SHADOWRUN

Court of Shadows

ALTERNATE SETTING SOURCEBOOK

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SHADOWRUN

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Good Cards, Bad Cards

by R. L. King

Last night Scrum, Marley, and I all had the same dream.

If that's not bad enough, it turned out we'd all had it more than once.

Don't get me wrong—it's not like we all sit around in a circle talking about our dreams while we do each other's hair or anything like that. It just happened that while we were killing some time in a bar on the outskirts of Butte on the way to our latest run, Scrum wasn't his usual self. Normally you could count on him to be the first one to get drunk and hit on everything with a Y chromosome, but tonight he was staring into his glass in an uncharacteristic pose of deep thought. When Marley punched him in the arm and asked him what was up, he said, "I had a dream. And it ain't the first time."

"We all have dreams." Marley threw back the rest of his beer. For a little dwarf, he could drink most orks, including Scrum, under the table when he had a mind to. We figured he probably had a spell to keep him from getting a hangover.

"I don't," I said. "Well, hardly ever. Except the last few nights." That was true. My dreams, on the rare occasions when I had them, usually focused on cleaning my guns. Yeah, I'm just that kind of girl. "Funny thing this time, though—all of 'em have been the same."

Scrum looked up, surprised. "Hey, yeah, me too."

"Don't tell me—lots of sweaty, naked threesomes?" Marley asked, but I didn't miss his odd expression. He was watching both of us more closely than he should have been.

Scrum didn't notice it, of course. "I wish. It's weirder'n that. I keep seein' this—doorway. It's in an old abandoned building. I dunno where it is—never been there before. It's one of those old-fashioned wood doors like in some fantasy trid or something. Got vines growin' all over it. It's partway open, and I can see inside. It's like … another world. And I keep feelin' like I want to go inside. Like there's somethin' I really want in there. But soon as I head for it, I wake up."

"Wait …" I said slowly, as a chill ran up my spine. "On the other side of the door—did the people look like they were in a castle or something? Dressed in old-fashioned fancy clothes?"

"Yeah," Scrum said. His brow furrowed under his blond brush-cut. "How'd you know that?"

"Hold on," Marley said, holding up a hand. Unlike his usual sly half-smile that made him look like he knew something we didn't, his lined face was serious and a little pale. "You two both had this dream? Of this doorway?"

"Looks that way," I said. "Why?"

"Because I had the same one."

"Okay, this drek keeps gettin' weirder," Scrum said. He slammed his glass down with more force than necessary, almost shattering it. "You know what? I want out. I'm gettin' sick of these fraggin' strange-ass runs. I wanna do somethin' normal for a while. Shoot somebody in the face. Break into someplace and grab somethin' we can sell." He finished his beer and waved for another.

"Come on," Marley said, but I could tell the dreams had both spooked and intrigued him. It went with the territory with the dwarf—if it was weird, he liked it, and if you couldn't explain it, he'd take hold of it like a hell hound with a chew toy until he'd wrestled it to the ground. "Yeah, I'll admit the last few runs have been a little unconventional, but you have to admit, the lady pays well. What do I care if the jobs don't make sense? She's not payin' us for sense."

I stared at the scarred plaswood table. Marley was right. Our latest Mr. Johnson (or rather, *Ms.* Johnson) was a mysterious woman who told us to call her Lady J. We'd never met her in person—the meets were always in the Matrix—but she always had the instructions hand-

delivered to us, along with a single tarot card we were supposed to leave at the scene of each job. Always the same one—the Magician. That part was important, she said. There had been four of the runs so far, over the last month, each one stranger than the last, and the pay for them had been enough that we hadn't had to take any other jobs in the meantime.

"That stuff makes my brain hurt," Scrum said. "All those fraggin' puzzles we have to figure out. It's prob'ly why I'm havin' dreams about some kinda fraggin' King Arthur drek."

"If they were easy, she wouldn't pay us like she is," Marley pointed out. Of course he'd say that—he was eating up the fact that none of the runs had been the kind of straightforward stuff Scrum liked. Me, I didn't care either way. The tricky stuff was a nice change—I had Lady J pegged as some kind of bored corp-princess type spending Daddy or Mommy's money playing jokes on her rich friends, and expected any day now she'd tire of it and cut us loose. I could ride it out till then—the paydays were great for my plans to replace my aging arsenal with newer models.

"He's right," I told the ork. "Besides, you can't get out yet. We've already accepted this job. We at least have to finish it."

"Fine," Scrum said. "But after this one, I'm out. I mean it, guys. You might like this weird crap, but I don't."

"Fair enough," Marley said. "C'mon. Let's go pick up the package from Lady J. And don't worry about the dreams—I don't think they have anything to do with the jobs. I think we're getting some feedback from all the drek happening around Yellowstone. Magic can play tricks on your mind."

"Even more reason to get the hell away from here," Scrum said.

The package was in a storage locker in downtown Butte, exactly where Lady J had told us it would be. It looked like the others: elegantly wrapped, with the instructions written in calligraphy on honest-to-drek *parchment.* Who used parchment anymore, unless they were getting married or something? It just added to my theory about the bored corp princess, except the writing looked like something you'd see in one of those old books in museums. We took the package back to the van and I busied myself running through all the automated checks on my guns while Marley opened it.

"This is strange," the dwarf said.

I stowed my Predator and looked up quickly. "What is?"

"Different card this time."

He held it up. Instead of the familiar figure of the Magician, this one featured a shadowy humanoid form and no label on the bottom. "Wonder why she'd change it up."

"Maybe she ran out of Magician cards," Scrum suggested.

"Or maybe she's moving into a new phase of her little game," I said, returning my attention to my guns. "Who cares? As long as her cred's good, I'm in. What's the job this time?"

"She wants us to break into a small, private collection and steal a jeweled bird figurine, then leave the card in its place. Then we go to an abandoned industrial park outside town. There's a hidden basement in one of the buildings—she's sent us all the details. We're supposed to break in and leave the figure in one of the file cabinets."

Scrum brightened. "Hey, at least we might get a little action this time."

Scrum didn't get his wish, which suited me just fine. But getting the damned bird still made me nervous.

The collection was housed in the penthouse of a high-rise apartment building. Lady J had sent us the security codes and told us the place wouldn't have live guards, so getting up there was easy enough. Hell, it looked like nobody even lived in the place—it was more like one of those staged showplaces you see when somebody's trying to sell a property. The only real impression I got was that the place was owned by a woman, since a lot of the elegant touches were too elaborate and feminine for most men, even rich ones. Except elves, maybe.

Scrum verified that no cameras were spying on us while Marley and I examined the room housing the collection. "She said to only take the bird," the dwarf said with regret, eyeing the dozen other glass cases containing everything from delicate sculptures to an open book he lingered a long time over before moving on.

"You sure we can't grab at least somethin' else?" Scrum asked, coming back in. "Bet some o' this stuff would sell for a fortune."

"We stick to the plan," Marley said firmly. He paused in front of the case containing the bird figure. "This feels wrong, though."

"How so?" I asked.

"It's different from the other jobs. More straightforward. No fraggin' puzzles."

"Maybe she got tired of makin' 'em up," Scrum suggested.

Marley shrugged. "Whatever. You know, I'm beginning to agree with you, Scrum. Let's finish this up and then tell Lady J she'll have to find herself another team. Once we get the payoff, we got enough cred we can take the rest of the year off anyway. Now shut up and let me deal with the magic on this case."

Grabbing the bird was positively anticlimactic. The intel Lady J gave us was even more spot-on than usual: she'd described both physical and magical security, and Marley had no trouble deactivating the wards around the case. Ten minutes later we were back in the van, the little bird figure snugged away in my shoulder bag.

The industrial park had been abandoned for quite some time, it looked like. Marley did a little research on the way over and found that it might have been owned by a subsidiary of a subsidiary of the Wind River Corporation, but the trail of red tape got so snarled he couldn't be sure. We stopped down the street, and Marley sent a spirit out to do recon while Scrum and I finished getting our weapons ready.

"I don't like this," the ork said, using the cameras on the outside of the van to scan the area.

"Quit bitching," Marley ordered, but he looked nervous too, and I noticed he didn't dismiss the spirit when it returned and reported the coast clear.

As we moved further into the park, I couldn't shake the feeling that it looked somehow familiar. The buildings were missing most of their armored glass, covered in layers of both physical and AR graffiti, and several of them looked like somebody had used them for explosive practice. There were five, arranged around a central courtyard with a broken fountain and scrubby, dying landscaping. Neither Marley's spirit nor our frequent

scans using thermo and low-light vision turned up any sign of metahuman habitation, except for a couple homeless orks huddled in the lobby of the building on the far right. We marked their location but didn't bother them since our building was a smaller, two-story one off to the left.

It wasn't until we got inside the building that Scrum spoke up, giving voice to the indistinct thoughts that had been trying to bubble their way to the top of my mind. "Hey, this looks like the place in that dream I been havin'."

Frag. That was it!

"Drek," I muttered, looking around with new insight as it all fell into place. He was right: the stained, blasted walls, the graffiti, the overwhelming sense of disrepair—they all matched what I'd seen over the last few nights. "What do we do?"

Marley stopped. His face looked troubled under his bushy brows—obviously he agreed with Scrum's assessment. But he shook his head. "What do you mean, what do we do? We do the job we were paid for. But we keep our eyes open," he added quickly. "If anybody sees any weird doorways, speak up."

I didn't like it, but Scrum seemed resigned to seeing things out, and I wasn't going to bail on the team. "Let's hurry," I said. "Suddenly this place is makin' my skin crawl."

We found the door to the stairway leading down to the basement. It was a pretty hefty security door, but somebody had long ago broken the lock. A few twisted wires hung free of what had once been a keypad next to it.

Scrum drew his AK-97 and took point, pushing the door open and waiting to see if anything attacked before stepping inside. Nothing did, so Marley and I moved in behind him.

The stairwell was lined with more graffiti, trash, and the husks of ancient electronics not even worth enough for the scavengers to sell. The stairs descended two more floors and ended at another security door. This one wasn't locked either, but it had warped so badly in its frame that it took Scrum's augmented strength to wrench it loose. A deafening screech sliced through the silence.

"Great," I muttered. "If anybody's within a klick, they know we're here now."

But Marley had stopped. "Hush," he murmured. "Look."

I saw the glow right away. Even though it was around a corner so I couldn't see what caused it, I knew. The soft, golden light was unmistakable.

"Come on," I said quickly. "Let's go. I don't want to—"

But Marley was already moving. Of course he was. He could no more fail to investigate something like this than I could leave my guns uncleaned after a run. It was part of his fraggin' mage DNA.

I glanced at Scrum, who shrugged, and the two of us went after him. Both of us had our guns out, every system on edge and ready to party. I scanned the hallway, cycling through my cybereyes' vision options, but nothing stood out.

But it was there, just like in the dream: an ancient wooden door in a wooden frame, bound in iron and dripping with ivy that seemed to move slightly as if a breeze were blowing through the corridor.

Free hint: We were two floors underground. There was no breeze.

The door was halfway open, revealing the view we'd all seen: a large room decorated as if for some fancy function, lit with an inviting golden glow. Figures flitted past in pairs and small groups, the bright colors of their finery shining like jewels when compared to our drab working gear.

None of that was what I noticed first, though. That would be the man standing just on the other side of the door.

He was watching us, and he was smiling.

"Welcome," he said, his voice musical and pleasant. He beckoned with one hand—the one that wasn't resting on the hilt of a large sword at his hip. "I've been expecting you."

"What the *frag?*" I felt Scrum stiffen next to me, and out of the corner of my eye I saw him bring his rifle barrel around and level it at the man.

"Who the hell are you?" Marley yelled. His hands began to glow as he gathered magical energy around them.

The man's smile didn't waver. He was an elf, tall and handsome even when compared to other elves. His hair was black, his clothes as old-fashioned and elegant as the others in the room, who didn't seem to have noticed us. There was something unworldly about him—about all of them, in fact. "What do you want?" I asked him. I glanced over my shoulder as if expecting something to be sneaking up on us, but nothing was.

"Please—come inside. We have much to discuss."

"Like hell we'll come in there," Scrum said. He reached out to slam the wooden door shut.

Above us came a familiar screech. Someone was up there, shoving past the warped security door.

We all jumped. Scrum whipped his gun barrel around toward the stairway and dropped to a crouch. "Incoming!"

"That will be the security detail that's been following you since you stole the figurine," the elf on the other side of the door said calmly, still smiling. "Well done, by the way. You followed my instructions quite adequately."

Wait a minute. "*Your* instructions?" My gaze darted between the stairs and the doorway as the sound of boots—lots of boots—pounded above us.

"You've got two choices, the way I see it," the man said serenely. "You've already betrayed the Lady—she's already discovered the theft of her property, and the little memento I had you leave behind." For a moment, he looked mock-rueful. "I wouldn't bet on your chances against her—or against them," he added, indicating the stairs with a careless gesture of his pointed chin.

"Or what?" Marley demanded.

"Or you come through, and you work for me." The man took a step back, leaving the way open for us. "Believe me—I've got a number of jobs I think you'll find intriguing. And quite lucrative."

The first of the security detail, clad in helmets and heavy armor and carrying assault rifles, hit the bottom of the stairs. "There they are!" one called, opening fire. A second later, two others joined in.

The three of us moved as one. What else could we do? Sometimes life gives you the choices you want, but most of the time in our line of work, you get fragged. Way of the world, chummer—you roll with it, or you die.

We dived through the opening and into the golden light, pushing each other forward and crashing in a heap to the intricately worked stone floor at the man's feet. I expected rounds to tear into me any second, but they didn't. When I glanced behind me, the door had closed, revealing nothing more than a blank wall with an elaborate tapestry showing a group of nobles on horses. They were all elves, I noticed—the things you notice when your brain goes haywire.

"Excellent choice," the man said, his smile widening—but it didn't reach his eyes. "Come. The world awaits."

The Impossible Gate

A rock, or at least probably a rock, hurtled and twisted toward her. Cordwainer moved, jerking, awkward, and it skimmed across her cheek instead of smashed. It must have had a sharp edge, because she felt a chill and a wetness on her cheek.

She would check it later. If later managed to exist.

Her feet jumped upward, her knees buckled, she lost her balance and tried to make it into a roll. It became mostly a flop. But everything on her was moving, so she crawled and scrambled before she could die from sitting still.

The only light came from the cracks, the angry orange of lava. Making the air hotter, less breathable. It might manage to smother her before anything else killed her. Or at least knock her out to make her an easier target.

She should probably just stop and let it happen while reviewing all the bad choices that led to this point. The insufficient backup. The decision to operate covertly in the Sioux Nation. Rejecting a cushy wagemage job. It was all wrong if it led her here, to an underground tunnel simultaneously erupting and collapsing around her.

But she couldn't stop moving. She simply was not built to give up.

She had no direction, no good option, no safe path. She had more rocks coming at her from all directions. How were they coming like that? Another mystery she would likely not solve in the few seconds of life she had left.

A crack to her left opened wider, heat blasted out, pushing her right. Where the ceiling was collapsing.

She went low, because that was her only option, then went lower. But there was no avoiding the everything that was falling on her. Hitting her head into blackness.

She went entirely down. What sense she had left waited for her cheek to hit something hard, or something hot.

Which made it entirely surprising to hit something soft and cool.

She pulled her arms over her head, in case more was falling on it. Nothing hit her. She heard no sounds of anything falling. Or anything at all, except—birds? It sounded like there were birds.

She blinked. It didn't work on the first try—her eyes stayed shut, everything stayed dark. She tried again. It worked better. There was light. Yellow light from above, not orange light from below. Occasionally filtered light, as if ...

As if leaves were wobbling in a gentle breeze.

She pushed herself up. Leaves and grass stuck to her cheek, because of the blood. She brushed lightly at them, but they remained stuck. She didn't feel like pulling.

"Am I dead?" she said. She hadn't meant to say it out loud.

"I was thinking the same thing," said another voice.

Cordwainer turned her head. A man—an elf, maybe, but with longer, pointier ears than she was used to—stood near her. He had striped pants, a black silk topcoat, and a matching top hat worn at a jaunty angle. If he was here, he must have been walking in these woods, but he did not have a spot of dirt on him.

She wanted to say something intelligent, or at least sensible, but she had absorbed too many rock blows for that to be possible.

The elf sighed. "I had hoped to perish before I saw etiquette so egregiously breached. Yet here we both are." He shook his head. "Unwelcome guests are just so ... unwelcome."

She was not about to fall into lava or have a cavern collapse on her. But Cordwainer had the distinct feeling that she was not safe.

Upon a great adventure he was bond,
That greatest Gloriana to him gave,
That greatest Glorious Queene of Faerie lond,
To winne him worship, and her grace to have,
Which of all earthly things he most did crave;
And ever as he rode, his hart did earne
To prove his puissance in battell brave
Upon his foe, and his new force to learne;
Upon his foe, a Dragon horrible and stearne.

— from *The Faerie Queen Book I*
by Edmund Spenser

> Don't post this immediately. Don't share it broadly. This is only for the three of you to look at for now. Something big has happened, and I have no idea just how the changes it has brought about are going to reshape the world. But I know two things: More changes will happen, and because of it, we need to know about the Seelie Court. The planes have shifted, and we have access that we didn't have before. I have a few sources in the Court, and they have helped me compile a lot of information about the how it works, its denizens, its politics, and more. They know there are things we need to know, but they also know this is not the time to advertise. There is an opening, but we dare not turn it into a highway. We have new opportunities, and that means new dangers. We need to learn, and we need to learn fast. Changes will not wait for us.

> I've started out with summaries of what I know, leading up to what happened. Then I'll rely on others to help us wander the strange quarters of this world that are beyond even me.

> Frosty

In the penumbra between the newly-formed nations and countries of the Sixth World and the borderless astral spaces of mystical planes, within the land called Tír na nÓg, the Seelie Court flickers in and out of existence like a bright, childhood memory. Some say the Seelie Court is a new phenomenon birthed by an Awakening, while others are convinced it has survived the eons in a pseudo-state as an arcane parasite, feeding off the sweet dreams of our youth, only to be spurred into being by a mighty leviathan slumbering in icy black depths of the ocean surrounding the Emerald Isle.

The truth of the faerie's distant past has long since been forgotten, and pretty fables have replaced intricate politics and complex histories that stretch back to the days before modern civilization. What is known, however, is that the Age of Legend gave birth to the names and myths that have echoed through to the present; the Irish fae once called their magical home "Tír na nÓg," the goddess whom they claimed to be descendant from is "Danu," and the thirty-five founding fae families referred to themselves as the "Tuatha de Danaan"—names rooted so far deep in a magical past, it is rumored that shamans can see the air shimmer when they are spoken aloud. Now, of course, Tir na nÓg is a nation humans and metahumans can visit, Danu is nowhere to be found, and the Tuatha de Danaan are not only fewer in number, their families incorporate fae from other countries as well.

Whatever the cause, however the denizens of the Sixth World choose to convince themselves of the reasons and history behind Tír na nÓg's magical origins, one thing is certain: The Seelie Court not only exists, it is more than a mere place to visit, for the courts of the fae hold many secrets that beg to be reaped by those cunning and savvy enough to travel here.

To know the Seelie Court and its many faeries is to remember the oldest of stories that have existed long before elves, orks, and dwarves walked the Earth; these are the living legends of fierce warriors and tender lovers, jealous courtiers and backstabbing usurpers, benevolent fae and foul creatures destined to destroy all the Seelie hold dear. These are the epic tales that were sung in the Age of Legend when humans cowered in the face of the unknown, when they gathered sacrificial offerings and prayed for protection, when they warned each other to avoid this timeless kingdom and kneel before the Tuatha de Danaan for fear they would never, ever return ...

... until now.

From Utopia to the Fall

For millennia, the faerie had remained interlocked in a precarious balance of power between the Seelie, the Unseelie and their respective Courts, and the wild faerie caught between them.

In the Fourth World, the fae moved freely about the realms, unfettered by their respective rulers to use magic as they saw fit, never realizing that mana was, in fact, a non-renewable resource. This Age of Legend, to the fae, is known as the Era of the Gilded Rose; their ballads sing only of a golden, honeyed harmony maintained by all. Reveling in this utopia, the faerie did not realize that mana had been slowly leaking from the earthly plane for some time.

Though there is no way to prove otherwise, it is believed that the denizens of faerie, including the residents of Tír na nÓg, did not realize what was happening until it was too late. Or, as is more likely, those who did learn that mana was depleting rapidly were powerless to stop it. It is known that the dawning of the Fifth World was slow and agonizing for the fae worldwide, and as magic eroded from the fabric of the earthly plane at a terrifying rate, terror struck the various courts and their families. None, however, was believed to have been hit harder than the Tuatha de Danaan.

The Rule of Many

With all eyes focused on the Seelie Court's emissaries, humans (and some metahumans) have mistakenly assumed that Tír na nÓg contains the faeries' sole ruling body. From the kappa to the aziza to the wendigo, the fae are not unique to the Tír nations, and though the truth of their origins may never be exposed or understood, a mounting pile of evidence points to other politically active courts and dignitaries. Whether they rule from their own meta- or astral plane or not, metahumans—which include the fae—are a global phenomenon. Not only are they as culturally rich and diverse as the Tuatha de Danaan themselves, they are also just as [illegible] and cautions, too. Perhaps even [illegible]

The dearth of magical energies affected the fae in many ways, and the knowledge that mana was not an eternal, abundant resource shocked them into action. Despite the evidence provided by theorists and scholars, mana was not drained evenly from the earthly plane—its disappearance was uneven and unpredictable. Thus hundreds, if not thousands, of fae were stranded in fields, glens, and mountaintops devoid of mana, only to transform into the bodies of humans, animals, and plants within hours. In their terrible grief, the surviving royal families blamed each other for the loss of their kin, their shortsightedness at their inability to control and monitor mana, and their forced separation from the humans. Each surviving family and faction—Seelie, Unseelie, and Wild—plotted against one another until their anger begot a terrible, decades-long conflict called the War of Sorrows.

The War of Sorrows may have taken place long ago at the beginning of the Fifth World, but its significance reverberates. What began as a battle of misplaced grief drew in fae from all over the world to fight against their own extinction. Some of those fae survived, trapped within the heart of faerie, while many others died by the hands of an enemy they never fully understood. Hundreds, if not thousands, of faeries died, and over half of the original Tuatha de Danaan were wiped out. As the war escalated night after night, the shadows of the dead eventually ripped through the gossamer-thin magic of the faerie realm, and an echo of their fading essences spilled onto the earthly plane.

Humans have witnessed the epic battles that pitted family against family and wiped out entire faerie clans—though they do not know what they were seeing. Those humans who witnessed the spectacle believed they were watching a Great Hunt that occurred once every fortnight; their stories weaved tales of luminous ghosts battling over rivers and streams, in forests and in glades under pale moonlight, hunting an invisible prey. But by the time the spirits of the fae bled through to the earthly plane, humans had already forgotten magic was once real. So, when the brassy horns of battle were heard from one end of a village to the other, the humans misunderstood the faerie's bloodlust, and proclaimed the fae to be sinful demons who had declared humans to be their enemy. This is how the roots of bigotry against elves and orks and dwarves and trolls dug deep into the psyche of humans, only to bear fruit centuries later in the Sixth World. This is another repercussion from the War of Sorrows.

Eventually, the War of Sorrows ended as it began: in dark and desolate grief for all those who'd been lost. The fae who hailed from distant lands were welcome to remain in the heart of Tír na nÓg, and its true inhabitants settled in for a long winter, waiting for the dawn of the next age.

Despite their reputation to the contrary, the faerie did not hate the humans of the Fifth World—at least at first—for they understood what mortals did not: humanity did not control the cycle of magic and, due to their limitations, did not cause the deaths of their many relatives. As the Tuatha de Danaan slaughtered each other on one plane, however, their brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, loved, lost, and died on the other—and those earth-bound souls never returned home. Many of the fae would now be horrified to admit it, but because they had murdered so many of their kind in their mystical lands, those terror-stricken souls could not properly be recycled, and the disruption of this cycle—and not the depletion of mana—is what rent the fabric of their metaplane beyond repair. This is why the Fifth World is considered by many faeries to be the Era of the Corpse-Lily, as it is a time of unspeakable grief and bloodshed, for the surviving fae of Tír na nÓg almost destroyed not only each other, but their very plane reality.

As time passed, and the veil between the planes grew so thick neither the descendants of those early fae nor their true kin were able to see, feel, or hear one another, proof that Tír na nÓg and the Tuatha de Danaan ever existed could only be found in epic ballads and laments for the dead. Forgotten and left to their own devices, a grim and silent peace eventually fell over the Courts and their fractured lands; worrying that what happened on the earthly plane might also happen in their homes, too, many faeries channeled their energies into artifacts and relics, like the Sixth World Tarot, to conserve mana for the next generation. Some of the surviving fae fell into a deep, mystical slumber, vowing only to wake when the curtain between the planes came crashing down, when mana returned and the Sixth World would heal their sundered lands, not knowing how many suns would have to rise and set before a new era would begin.

The rare few who survived the passage of time find that their home is not what they remember it. Those faerie who have yet to rise remain sleeping in their sealed crypts until someone—or some thing—dares to enter those hallowed grounds.

The ruling families of the Tuatha de Danaan never slept, however, and worked tirelessly to restore the Seelie Court and prepare it for the new age that would eventually arrive.

A Realm of Broken Hearts

The Tuatha de Danaan remember the Year of Chaos like it was yesterday, for the mana that began to flow in the Sixth World shrouded their mystical lands, too, filling in the gaping wounds that had existed since the beginning of the Era of the Corpse-Lily. This sudden rush of mana fractured their fragile realm further, for much of the damage caused by the War of Sorrows was irreparable. As the magical energies shifted, these forces began to rupture the physical shape of the faerie kingdoms. Though no one is certain how or why or when it happened, whole sections of Tír na nÓg manifested in the reality of the earthly plane, while other lands—the mystical heart containing the Seelie Court, Unseelie Court, and surrounding glens containing wild fae and ruins from the Third World—never fully materialized, and remained as the "space between spaces" on a metaplane accessible by those who know the way in.

As the planes shifted and changed in the early days of the Sixth World, so did the fae. Some remained in the Seelie Court, while others blended in with their newly birthed metahuman relatives, to help form the Tír nations of Tír Tairngire and Tír na nÓg on the earthly plane. Keeping their origins secret, the original fae—or True Fae—experienced first-hand how humans were repulsed by their existence. The peace that humans and fae once enjoyed, long, long ago in idyllic years of the Fourth World, had been replaced by revulsion and bigotry that escalated quickly to paranoid rants and riots. Human who once described the legendary fae using words of wonderment and delight, like "enchanting" and "otherworldly," quickly turned to slurs such as "dandelion eater," "sewer pixie," and "mana-waster" once they stood beside them. (The frequent lack of distinction between elves and fae among the masses caused additional problems and prejudice.)

Word of the growing human vs. metahuman crisis quickly reached the ears of the Tuatha de Danaan, who struggled to make sense of this news. Had they not always treated the humans fairly? Did the humans not traditionally enjoy their blessings? Though precious few fae have survived the ending of the Fourth, the Fifth, and the dawn of the Sixth, none could remember what the Age of Legend was truly like, and they stumbled on, bewildered and frightened, hiding in their respective Courts to plot against one another like they'd always done.

It is commonly believed that the bigotry against metahumans is the primary reason why the Seelie Court has operated in secret, accessible to the True Fae and no other. This is only partly the cause, as their need to remain mysterious and undiscovered is also due to their widespread, internalized fear that the War of Sorrows might happen again. While the Tuatha de Danaan—and Lady Brane Deigh herself—understand the havoc humans can wreak, they do not believe their biases will result in the destruction of the Tír nations. In truth, their location remains a secret because the fae face much greater threats than the ignorance of a few bigots: greedy megacorporations intent on dissecting and collecting every inch of their mystical realm, immense dragons who desire nothing more than to swallow them whole, and the biggest danger of all, the Unseelie who want nothing more than to destroy the fae and the metaplane they call home. Should their borders be open to all, or so the Seelie Court's courtiers claim, the Unseelie would no longer be filled with spies and thieves—their ranks would swell with racists, too.

Defending themselves on all sides, Lady Brane Deigh and the fellow members of her Seelie Court struggle to balance the needs of the court and their realm against the many forces that seek to end or change them.

The Flow of Time

Many humans grew up listening to fairy tales, and they think that the fae are immortal. This is a half-truth wrapped in a legend and a lie. The river of time flows at different speeds in the faery metaplane, and this is what led to the mistaken belief that they live forever. The Tuatha de Danaan can be hurt—and killed—like their metahuman relatives on the earthly plane, but they age at a much slower rate provided they remain close to the heart of Tír na nÓg. The vagaries of this time flow are mysterious; sometimes, time is slow in the Court; other times, it is fast.

Though no one knows for certain, many of the fae believe that "time gone wrong" is not a natural or accidentally occurrence, that this is either the ripple effect of a protective spell no longer working properly, or a security measure to protect rare and powerful artifacts of varying degrees of magical abilities. Some courtiers whisper that controlling the flow of time would be something the Tuatha de Danaan would want to do. It is more likely, however, that mana does not act uniformly and doesn't permeate this realm evenly throughout. Thus, mana might be gathering—for whatever reason—within the Seelie Court itself, forming a pool of pure magic.

Travelers should take note that the flow of time can be measured within the fae realm; clocks and timekeeping devices will accurately display how fast (or how slow) time is moving. Too, the effects of time are not necessarily felt by its visitors because, just like the belief that the fae are immortal, there is some truth to the fairy tales. For the most part, time will move slower in the Court than it does in the Sixth World; generally speaking, a month spent in the Court is equivalent to a day passing in the Sixth World. There is, however, the mysterious effect of faerie food and drink. While not everything prepared in the Court has this effect, the specialties of the Queen's kitchen, honey cake and leann daerg (red ale) will slow time, so that the effect is reversed—one day will pass in the Court for each month in the material plane. Visitors to the Court, then, need to be careful about what they eat.

Visitors will naturally question how people experiencing time differently can co-exist within the same Court. This simply joins the ranks of the mysteries of the Court and its ability to make seemingly immutable laws of time and space into a toy, or perhaps stretched taffy.

WINGS, TALES, AND POLITICS

Debunking the "arrogant" sixth world fae

by Professor Allyson Stern

Fragile wings, tiny bodies, and pastel-colored hair may describe the faeries of folklore, but these fairy-tale tricksters and guardian spirits are far more complex than the childhood fables reveal and, despite pundits' claims to the contrary, they are not haughty elves who think they're "above" the rest of us. In every tale, whether it's Rumplestilskin, Bunbuku Chagama, or The Fairy Bride, the heroic deeds of the humano-centric characters are so iconic, they have been permanently imprinted on our human psyches since the long days of the Fifth World. The assumption that the fae should serve humans, unfortunately, has complicated relations with the Tír nations and the Tuatha de Danaan, and this can be traced to a lack of faerie heroes and heroines in our social consciousness. Even with respect to mortality tales, like Frau Holle, the fae and their ilk exist solely to improve the lot of humans in emotional, psychological, or physical ways. Is it any wonder some fairy-crazed humans are desperate to find the mythical fae? Or why the Tuatha de Danaan have closed themselves off from most humans?

To learn more about the True Fae and to understand them, we must think of them not as magical beings, but as a society filled with thinking, breathing, living metahumans who have the same wants and needs as the rest of us do. They may never form megacorporations, staff human universities, or take vacations like humans do, but faeries have their own mores, customs, and habits that are as diverse and numerous, if not more so, as any culture in the earthly plane. The Seelie Court, for example, has always been considered a place of power, but even this royal fairy court is at the center of tall tales and outright lies. Human emissaries would do well to remember that any court—especially one involving the fae—is more than a pretty chamber with a banquet table and a dance floor.

The political damage may already be done, however, for the metahuman vs. human conflict surely has not gone unnoticed by the fae. Can we blame them for acting defensive? Imagine their surprise and shock witnessing the vitriol metahumans have suffered just for being who they are. If the rumors are true, that the Tuatha de Danaan are the original homo sapiens nobilis and their peoples have existed since the dawn of time, then it will take a lot more than patience to earn their trust.

View from the Skyrise

While there is waste and inefficiencies in any megacorporation—*you* try organizing something that vast without a little slippage—the main characteristic of the megas is their ruthless practicality. Any resource that pops up—buried ore, mana or Resonance pools, rare paracritters, whatever—are approached from a singular perspective, with a simple question motivating the corps' actions. That question is: How can I use this? Or less charitably phrased: How can this be exploited? The Seelie Court and surrounding realms are no different, so with new access available, the megas are already lining up to see how they can take advantage of what's available. So it's smart to get some idea of how they're looking at this new resource.

The heart of the Tír nations is an attractive target for anyone with an interest in faeries. Rich in mana, precious resources like orichalcum, magical artifacts, enticing secrets and, of course, the fae themselves, the Sixth World megacorporations are willing to pay exorbitant sums for the right job and the perfect crew. Sure, a shadowrunner's payout could be huge—but if the Seelie Court fae so much as whiff any wrongdoing, runners will suffer the consequences. Still, there are plenty of reasons to take Mr. Johnson up on his offer.

The many faces of Mr. Johnson

POSTED BY: HAZE

"Mr. Johnson is anonymous for a reason." At least, that's what your fixer will tell you. Here's what you don't know. Your precious Mr. Johnson who wants you to visit Tír's legendary metaplane? Might just be a frakking faery. In fact, she might be your patron, too. Oh, your fixer will tell you there's no such thing as faeries, that the knife-eared Seelies are just elves with an attitude. They're real, and they are not stupid. Thing is, the Tuatha de Danaan are the kind of fae who have long memories, and they don't give two dreks about anyone but themselves. Cross 'em, and you might find yourself stuck inside of a tree. Do right by them, and you might end up in artifacts or blessings. So, the next time you take a job that puts you up close and personal with the fae, remember this: Mr. Johnson could be standing right next to you, and don't you forget it. Capiche?

ARES MACROTECHNOLOGY

Shadowrunners speculate what the Detroit-based corporation might possibly want from the fae, and some don't believe Damien Knight has an interest in hiring them. He does, but for all the wrong reasons. Damien is convinced that the Seelie Court is a force to be reckoned with, and he's willing to pay good money to find out what their weaknesses are. Should the Seelie Court fall, he surmises, Ares is in an excellent position to become a military supplier for the Tír nations. Of course, Knight's ego might get in the way of his schemes first, for deep down the flamboyant playboy would sacrifice his gun collection to visit the Seelie Court and be spotted on the arm of a courtier. Though Ares' requests are simple, the fae continue to refuse to meet with official representatives of the corp—at least until weapons are needed. For now, however, the Seelie Court regards the Ares Corporations as a group of bloodthirsty warmongers who lack the ability to negotiate and broker truces. They also sense desperation on the part of Ares, which is not something they respect.

AZTECHNOLOGY

On the surface, Aztechnology wants what every other manufacturer desires: to become an official supplier of the Seelie Court. Peel back a few layers, and their intentions might seem opportunistic, if not a little sinister. Aztechnology doesn't want to just be "a" supplier, they want to be "the only" legitimate trader for the Seelie Court, and they're not above cutting down the competition—literally—to ensure that happens. Shadowrunners might be hired to sabotage Aztechnology's rivals, but they could be brought before the Seelie Court to testify against Aztechnology, too. If their plots are uncovered, the Seelie Court's retribution would be swift and merciless.

Beyond simple mercenary goals, though, is Aztechnology's deep interest in exploring areas of magic others might avoid. How this list for magical power will spur their interactions with the Court is a subject making a lot of observers quite nervous.

EVO CORPORATION

The Evo Corporation will publicly disavow any interest in the fae, because what they want is beyond unethical—even for them. Members of the Evo Corporation are desperate to get their hands on one of the Tuatha de Danaan to perform experiments on them and incorporate their findings into their research (apparently they didn't learn anything important in the wake of their cruel experiments in AIs). It would all be in the name of science, of course. To ensure no faerie investigates them further, they are hoping to present key findings before the Seelie Court, to "further the spirit of camaraderie among all metahumans," according to the language of one internal document. So far, the Evo Corporation has not been granted an official invitation, and some runners wonder if there's truth to the rumors that this megacorp sponsored an early (and now lost) expedition to the Court.

HORIZON GROUP

The people-centric megacorp is, according to the fae, refreshingly upfront about their goals. Good ole Gary Cline wants to operate a travel agency specializing in fantasy-themed tours to and from the Seelie Court, and he has already presented his grand idea before the Tuatha de Danaan. Some of the fae find him charming, if a bit crude, and with the right security they might agree to his plans—if they can convince Lady Brane Deigh there is nothing sinister about human curiosity. Courtiers closest to her know what concerns her, though, and it's not Gary. The Lady is more afraid of her metaplane being exploited and what might happen if the Matrix, which she barely understands, records evidence of the many treasures she has pledged to protect. If, all of a sudden, Seelie Court luminaries join the latest line up of simstars, there's no telling what eager fans might do to break protocol once they become obsessed with meeting them.

MITSUHAMA COMPUTER TECHNOLOGIES

Similar to Aztechnology, Mitsuhama has a vested interest in working with the Seelie Court to supply, procure, invent, and fix magical goods. Unlike any other megacorp, however, Mitsuhama is not willing to change their brutal and punitive tactics just to work with the fae, and they wouldn't turn down a job if it meant undermining the Seelie Court, either. To many politicians, Mitsuhama represents a legitimate threat to the Tír nations and the faery metaplane because of their ability to blend technological expertise (which the Seelie Court does not possess) with the production of magical goods. Being lauded in both fields is intimidating to the Tuatha de Danaan, and many courtiers would pay

handsomely to learn more about Mitsuhama in order to defend themselves against this potential foe. Savvier fae believe that inviting Mitsuhama to the Court is a smarter move, if only to assess how much power they possess.

NEONET

The force behind the Matrix has yet to reach out to the Seelie Court, and their intentions are largely unknown. Of course, the tech megacorps' silence has been interpreted by many as a clear sign they do want something, though some believe they are tied up enough with crises in their home plane and are not prepared to worry about another realm of existence. In the absence of information, rumors swirl whenever "Tír" and "NeoNET" are mentioned in the same article. Some runners believe that NeoNET is pioneering a method that will allow the Matrix to run on closed loop networks in mana-rich metaplanes. Others think that NeoNET has already been hired by the fae to secretly acclimate them on how to live, work, and play in the Sixth World. Whatever the truth is, neither NeoNET nor the Seelie Court have admitted how, or even if, the two are connected.

RENRAKU COMPUTER SYSTEMS

As the world's largest specialists in data, Renraku prides themselves on knowing everything there is to know—about everything. Thanks to their respect for traditions, Renraku was the first megacorporation to successful negotiate a contract with the Seelie Court. The nature of the contract, on the surface, seems mundane; it was an agreement to conduct a census, a "who's who in faery," that would accurately provide Lady Brane Deigh with a list of her courtiers, servants, royal relatives, and emissaries abroad. In the hands of the right runner this list, which is kept secure by Renraku, could provide clues to help fake an identity or find a patron. Renraku considers their work with the fae to be extremely important, however, and have taken extra steps to protect the data they've gleamed and any and all information related to future contracts. Rumors persist that a small, hidden network of faerie servants, the coimeádaí, hold some of this data in the Court, and finding this network is of high interest to those who believe it exists.

SAEDER-KRUPP HEAVY INDUSTRIES

To understand what this megacorporation desires from the fae is to glimpse inside the mind of a dragon. The great dragon Lofwyr, as it turns out, does want something from the Seelie Court, and has attempted to cross the border into Tír na nÓg many times. He has, so far, been unsuccessful, and rumor has it there are standing orders to bar his entry to the nations of Tír. The fae—and elves by default—will change the subject when pressed. Runners who want to live dangerously might ask their fixer to do a search for the mystical origins of the Jewel of Memory and see what kind of jobs turn up.

Searching for Shadows and Wisps

The Seelie Court and its denizens have always existed in thought, memory, and legend to varying degrees, but it wasn't until Goblinization, which began in 2021, that shadowrunners, con artists, investigators, and concerned citizens began to actively search for it on behalf of concerned citizens worldwide. What passes for a normal, healthy ork or troll teenager now scared a lot of unsuspecting parents into taking action during those early days, so when the government couldn't provide answers, many parents took matters into their own hands.

At first, Goblinization was viewed by many humans to be a curse, and hidden biases began to form that those who changed were foul, dirty—even evil. It was easier for humans to think that an adult might "turn" for supernatural reasons than it was to realize their families had latent genes. Goblinization was a normal, if not horrific and painful, part of metahuman evolution in the Sixth World, and many fae are sympathetic to their plight, particularly elves and dwarves. Had they guessed, the Seelie Court would never have imagined that the rebirth of metahumans would be so agonizing. It is for this reason that the fae regard this age as the Era of Bloodflower.

Desperate to find answers to the changes they could not possibly understand, some humans gave into their superstitious beliefs when logic and reason failed them, and sought to make amends with the fae of myth and legend in exchange for their "blessings." Other, bewildered families fell prey to con artists who took advantage of their confusion, and the unsuspecting paid handsomely for faux cures, ineffective magical relics, and divinatory readings that confirmed their worst fears. When one miracle cure was debunked, however, another shady rumor was not far behind. Some hustlers even went so far as to convince families that their teenagers had been swapped with cursed "changelings." For a

nominal fee, of course, these opportunists would return the imposter offspring to the mythical Seelie Court in exchange for a picture perfect human child. Still others paid handsomely for maps detailing Tír na nÓg and the possible location of the Seelie Court, desperate to place their faith and trust in the mysterious and haughty faeries of old.

Humans and metahumans alike had no idea whether or not the Tuatha de Danaan actually existed; they assumed they must because of the fairy tales they had internalized for far too long. Ninety-nine percent of the mapped routes, cures, relics, and surefire methods to communicate with the fae were fake, in part because panicked parents were easy marks. There were a few maps, however, that were cobbled together from memory and myth. These hand-drawn maps held the keys to unlocking the doors to the Seelie Court, whether the Tuatha de Danaan wanted them to or not, and their portrayals were eerily accurate.

Despite the amount of trickery and deception, it is commonly believed that an earnest search for the Seelie Court took place sometime in 2035 after Liam O'Connor became President of Tír na nÓg. The first expedition was led by a group of explorers who, for some unknown reason, had in their possession a key that could unlock any door in any realm. Despite the many warnings they'd been given, the adventurers led a procession of wayward souls straight into the Seelie Court—and were never heard or seen from again. The second expedition followed shortly thereafter, with the goal of uncovering the whereabouts of the missing explorers. In a show of support for the humans, or so it would seem, Liam O'Connor escorted a small consortium of foreign dignitaries to meet with members of the Seelie Court.

Upon the dignitaries' return, Liam's then-Vice President Maureen O'Dowd conducted a national funeral for members of the first expedition, paid a stipend to their families, and warned a grieving populace of the dangers of traveling without proper training and equipment. To the people of Tír, the first expedition was naïve and unprepared to deal with the rigors of traveling to the Seelie Court. The truth? No one knows what happened to the first expedition, not even the fae themselves.

While humans were being transformed into orks and trolls on the earthly plane, a different kind of Awakening was happening on the metaplane of the Seelie Court, one that affected the magical, lustrous fabric of its fragile existence that had, up until 2043 or so, remained undetectable by magic or technology.

Missing in Action

The premier expedition to the Seelie Court is so poorly documented, conspiratorial rumors continue to swirl whenever the explorers are mentioned in Tír. Jasper de Howlie, a courtesan known for his sweet, singing voice, is said to be the only faerie who encountered the group of curious humans desperate to find them. Jasper has never been a suspect in the disappearance of the explorers, and visitors are free to question him. When pressed for answers, a haunted look will come over his face, and he will cryptically whisper: "By Blood it is Done. By Mana it is Undone. By Tears it is Made Anew." Lady Brane Deigh has internally forbidden members of the Seelie Court to waste time on what she considers to be past history. If there is a conspiracy waiting to be discovered, it seems the fae won't openly d[illegible].

Among the fae, it is believed that [illegible] of the first expedition's whereabouts would be well rewarded by humanocentric elites [illegible] defunding Mothers of Metahumans as part of the overall effort to suppress [illegible].

COURTS AND MANA

It is said that when mana returned to the earthly plane and the Tír nations fully manifested in that space, the Seelie Court held a great feast in celebration that the Sixth World had begun. Not all of the fae were happy, however, and worry spread about how deep the changes the Awakening would be, and how long they would last. Also at issue is just how much control the Court has over those changes.

The Tuatha de Danaan have always known that mana is unpredictable and cannot be controlled, but it could be used, harvested, and directed. During the long years of the Fifth World, the metaplane containing the heart of faerie lumbered on in a pseudo-realistic state, and all beings the realm conserved their mana, treating as a precious resource.

The philosophy of the three original factions—Seelie, Unseelie, and Wild—remained largely static throughout the Era of the Corpse-Lily. The Seelie, who wanted to restore and protect the realm of faerie, were mana conservationists who believed that mana should only be used when absolutely necessary. The devastating

losses the Tuatha de Danaan suffered during the War of Sorrows, coupled with the trying, long years of the Fifth World, led to an apathetic Seelie Court built on routine and outmoded ways of thinking. The Unseelie, on the other hand, were rumored to be the exact opposite of the Seelie Court. Where the Seelie were protectors and focused on conserving mana, the Unseelie were thought to spend mana freely to further their ambitions and fulfill the Prophecy of the Unmaker. This foretelling has been discovered in bits and pieces, but from what some faeries have discovered, the prophecy is either concerned with the existence of the meta- and astral planes and the causes of the cyclical depletion and replenishment of mana or it's about the creation and destruction of metahumans and artifacts. If the Unseelie Court still exists—a fact that has yet to be definitively proven in the Era of the Bloodflower—they would be obsessed with the destruction of the Seelie Court in order to fulfill the terms of the prophecy. True to their name, on the other hand, the Wild Fae traditionally didn't have an agenda or a reason for using mana. They acted whenever and however they wished—until very recently. Many of the wild fae have been joining the Seelie Court to work for the Tuatha de Danaan as their bodyguards and emissaries, translators and diviners, entertainers and scholars.

FACTIONS WITHIN FACTIONS

To varying degrees, the faeries within the Seelie Court have always had their fair share of temporary allegiances for some reason or another. These were often short-lived, however, for their aims were small and petty, in part because entrenched rivalries were at the forefront of their minds for so many years among those who remained active. The Awakening, the "rebirth" of metahumans, and the return of mana, ended the stagnation felt by all within the realm of the fae. Yet, the significant, physical changes to the heart of faerie and the lands of Tír affected each member of the courts very differently.

Some faeries saw the humans as a threat, while others worried the appearance of new metahumans meant that an attack on the Seelie Court was imminent. Many believed that the process was incomplete, and they alone can restore peace between the metahumans and humans. Whatever the reason, whichever the faerie, entrenched ideas and lethargic relationships were shaken loose in the years that followed 2011, and matters of the court shifted from the latest fashions to a struggle for power, both literally and figuratively.

On the surface, even to outsiders, it seems as if the Seelie Court has been in turmoil ever since the coronation of Lady Brane Deigh. This isn't exactly true, however, for the problems within the court have little to do with politics. Most members of the Seelie Court are fascinated by the collection and creation of magical artifacts that can be used for a variety of purposes, and there is one particular artifact that continues to hold their interest: the Sixth World Tarot. Whether by design or Fate, whispers emanating from the Court is that the traditional rules no longer apply, and new alliances have formed around questions the fae want answered, deep-seated fears they hope never materialize, and needs they are desperate to fulfill. Unlike the factions of the past, however, the factions tied to the tarot are a lot more formidable and powerful than the allegiances of the past. Thus far, ten factions have been identified, but there are likely many others. To many, the fractious nature of the Court may explain their cryptic means of communication or their furtive glances, but to the visitors who truck with the fae, there is a simpler explanation. Beneath the thin veneer of formality, the Seelie Court is ripping itself apart from within. Whether that is the doing of the Unseelie Court or not, the Tuatha de Danaan are locked in a struggle to regain control, power that was lost following the departure of Liam O'Connor and the continued loss of mana from their realm.

THE PATH TO FAERIE

With no way to prove the origins of the Seelie Court and its denizens, humans and metahumans are right to be skeptical that the so-called mysterious Tuatha de Danaan are, in fact, the True Fae who survived the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth World. What is known is that the heart of Tír na nÓg exists in a specific metaplane, and it can be accessed using mundane and magical methods. Though getting into the Court isn't as much of a problem as leaving it, the fae are not accustomed to outsiders and view the uninvited with suspicion. Other travelers have visited the realm, and they have done so by:

- Using a magical artifact.
- Performing an arcane ritual.
- Finding a willing guide.
- Working with an Adept.
- Discovering one of the original maps to the fae.
- Accidentally stumbling onto the plane.

For those who know what to look for, the path to the heart of the fae is visible. In recent years, mana has begun to leak out of the Seelie Court and has surrounded the Tír nations, encircling it like a bubble. By some accounts, it interferes with the Veil around the nation; by others, it strengthens it. Some mana chasers believe that what is dribbling from this leak can be collected. Though this may prove to be impossible, what this fog of mana can do is provide a trail of breadcrumbs that lead observers back to the faerie's metaplane and its thinning mana barrier. Many thought it would be the key to finding a predictable path to the Seelie Court. Until Yellowstone happened.

BY INVITATION ONLY

Faeries are, for many reasons, distrustful of humans and metahumans who seek their metaplane. Most, if not all, understand that anyone who wishes to visit with them has an agenda in mind. Though the factions are prepared to deal with political opportunists, spies, and schemers, they are under-equipped to deal with the criminal underground. The ways of the Court reflect a social hierarchy and entrenched methods of dress, culture, and manners that are so slow to change, outsiders tend to stick out—especially if they rely on crude language or beat up informants for information. Violence, in the Seelie Court especially, is viewed to be barbaric, for throwing a punch is viewed as a last resort and words hold great significance among the fae.

In order to be welcomed into the Seelie Court as a guest, visitors need to be invited by a patron who is willing to take responsibility for their missteps should they run afoul of royalty. The number of visitors in any given group may have multiple patrons; the decision to sponsor a guest, however, is typically decided by a Court faction.

Embossed with the seal of its corresponding faction, the invitation is a fae-created magical artifact with a unique, temporary use. Woven from the protective, magical vines that cover the doors leading to the Seelie Court, the invitation grants access to the royal chambers provided the bearer is present with a member of that corresponding faction. Once inside, the visitor does not need to remain by their patron's side, but to get in they'll need an invitation and a witness. In general, invitations are issued for a variety of reasons. These might include:

- Participating in a ceremony (inauguration, Court's blessing, holiday celebration, wedding)
- Witnessing a declaration of the court (announcement of title or land, sentencing of punishment, receipt of a gift)
- Negotiating a contract, truce, or deal on behalf of an approved third party
- Testifying before the Court during legal proceedings
- Trading with the Court as a merchant or corporate buyer
- Presenting evidence or research of a scientific, technologic, or magical nature
- Serving as a personal bodyguard
- Working for one of the factions in a public capacity
- Offering a gift, boon, or marriage proposal
- Acting as a proxy (or stand-in) for a fae in a mock battle or test of wills as a guest of honor
- Entertaining the Court in an artistic performance
- Concocting dishes for the banquet table
- Enlisting in a faction's army
- Providing military expertise or strategies

To be a guest of the Court is to be afforded an honor most humans couldn't dream of, for visitors are granted the privilege of meeting the Tír's highest authority.

The role of the patron, for some, is more than a ceremonial gesture, for their presence indicates a willingness to trust outsiders that the Tuatha de Danaan do not typically share. Even so, after travelers arrive at Court, they are often prompted to declare the purpose of their visit. Those who are not forthcoming with their intentions might warrant further scrutiny, which many factions would like to avoid. Lady Brane Deigh might pay the right guest handsomely for more information about their patron, especially since patrons agree to take the brunt of the punishment should any wrongdoing be discovered. To the unprepared, a simple presentation before the Seelie Court could result in disaster for everyone involved.

This, then, might be the most calamitous effect of the the Yellowstone incident—that uninvited, unprepared guests might find their way to the Court and be eaten alive. Possibly figuratively, possibly literally.

THE YELLOWSTONE CALAMITY

When the earth shook under Yellowstone on July 27, 2078, some geologists thought they were looking at the beginning of the end of North America. The scaling up of the seismic readings from the caldera indicated an approaching eruption that would blow the crust off of tens of thousands of square kilometers, send tremendous amounts of ash into the air, and alter the climate and agriculture of one of the most fertile areas of the world. The buildup was so fast that they knew they couldn't issue any warning that would be useful. They probably couldn't even save themselves. They mainly could just sit and watch the jagged lines of looking disaster spike higher and higher. The ones closest to Yellowstone felt the earth moving.

Then—what? Then the mystery lots of people are going to spend piles of money chasing. The eruption and the accompanying earthquake somehow swallowed itself, like the earth had a terrible case of gastric distress that was relieved with a simple burp. There was a quake, felt as far away as Cheyenne, but nothing major. A disaster that would have brought the Great Ghost Dance to the minds of the few who remember it just up and vanished.

At least, physically it did. In the manasphere, it was something else, but monitoring that is far more difficult than keeping an eye on how the ground moves. Most of what is available are anecdotes—stories of a small group of shamans in the Tetons who all burned out at once, blinding headaches that hit every Awakened person in Laramie, astral sparks and swirls that even mundanes could see, and so on. As with the physical shaking, some observers thought this might herald a considerable ebb in the flow of magic in North America, or even the end of the Awakening. But in the weeks that have passed since the calamity, the manasphere seems to be largely the way it used to be, as far as we can tell.

So after the initial panic, there was an eruption that damaged Yellowstone but did not hit any densely populated areas too hard, and disruption to the manasphere that might have caused some individual tragedies but no widespread damage. Why, then, are people starting to refer to it as a calamity?

First, because it happened in Old West territory, and the word seems suited to that area. But second, because it left one piece of notable permanent damage. It left a hole.

The explosion in Yellowstone, however it happened, opened a new passageway to the Seelie Court. It's not easy to find, but if you do, you can journey to the Seelie Court without aid or invitation. Due to the location of the eruption, the opening started in Sioux Nation territory, but reports say it is drifting in an easterly direction. They also say it occasionally blinks out of existence, then briefly appears in some far-off locale. Then returns to where it left off.

It is unstable. It leads to an unsafe, unfriendly place. Its future is uncertain. And much of the Sixth World is rushing to find it, attempt to control it, and possibly secure the incredible power and treasures on the other side.

This gate is a world-changer, both for our world and the world it leads to. And it is tough to imagine that connection will make either a better place.

The Seelie Court

by Purlie Tallow

You have made it to a place where the uninvited never travel. You have leaped head-first into a liquid not knowing if it's comfortingly warm, icy cold, or acidic. You are playing with powers you do not understand, in an attempt to gain what you have never dreamed you could actually obtain. You are in over your head, but you have some brief moments to learn how to swim. Here, then, out of our kindness, are some instructions and guidelines about how the Court works and who makes it function—elements that will be critical to your effort to stay afloat.

Orders of the Court

THE MORNING HEARINGS

The morning hearings are the Court at its most formal. It is grandeur and ceremony, pomp and circumstance. There are times to speak and times to be silent, and extreme disapproval that descends on those who are not aware of the rules. It is when the Queen of the Court condescends to meet with the people—the "common folk," insofar as that term has any meaning when it comes to the denizens of the Court. In a normal royal court, this is when the ruler hears disputes between landowners, matters such as the exact placement of fence lines, or the disposition of livestock that might have gone astray of their designated pastures. The Seelie Court is quite different, and the matters of business brought up in morning hearings cover a vast range of issues. Here is a sample of some of the things mentioned in recent hearings:

A complaint from Warden Banleigh Swale about free spirits of beast being "overly aggressive with the local flora and fauna."

A petition from Royal Executioner Donal Viltharion asking for eight different violations to be escalated to capital crimes. Viltharion makes such requests regularly, in his ongoing effort to have something to do.

- A dispute from two identical women, both calling themselves "Stacia," asking that the other be found guilty of excessive imitation and be forcibly and permanently polymorphed.
- A long stare from a morbi who insisted on having a spot at the hearing (by repeatedly pulling on the sleeve of Steward Fiona Saito) but said nothing during its allotted time. It merely stared with empty, gaping eyes and unnerved everyone in the chamber.
- Twenty minutes of unintelligible squawking from bird-like leshii that the Queen listened to intently.
- The dramatic presentation of three cards from the Sixth World Tarot that subsequently turned up in the pockets of at least half a dozen courtiers and then disappeared.
- An extravagant theory about what caused the death of Gristle Teres that left one-third of the audience confused, one-third angry, and one-third leaping to their feet in applause.

All this is to say that there is an air of unpredictability about the Morning Hearings that draws an audience of courtiers interested in seeing just what might happen. And where there is the Queen and a substantial body of courtiers, there are large groups of people who want to rub elbows with those who have power, or at least be seen next to them.

Attending Morning Hearings is simple, as the only thing you have to do is show up. The Queen makes a point of demonstrating her trust in the people who

guard her (which includes herself) so that no security checkpoints other guards restrict attendance. The ever-present spirits who monitor Court proceedings are, of course, watching, but they tend to provide warnings to officials rather than restrict access. Simply put, if you can find your way to the Court, you can attend Morning Hearings.

Being able to speak is slightly more complicated. The Steward accepts requests to speak, and that usually comes with some questioning about speakers' intents and purposes, which often have various detection spells and assensing activities accompanying them. Be aware that the mere existence of a hidden motive when you want to speak is not necessarily reason enough to disqualify you, as hidden motives are simply par for the course in the Court's normal functioning.

Should you be granted permission to speak, be sure to address the Queen as Her Royal Highness. Deviations from form, even if they are an attempt to pile on additional praise, are not warmly welcomed. If the Queen is not present, her designated representatives should be addressed as Your Excellency. Once you have been granted permission to speak, you have some freedom about what you say and how you say it. Deviations from your expressed subject matter may even be tolerated, if they seem interesting enough. But once the Steward pounds her staff on the floor, you are done. Continuing to speak beyond that point will be met by a Silence spell, and that is if the Queen and her people are feeling gracious. Far worse punishments are possible.

Also note that the Queen does not feel any compulsion to allow everyone who was cleared to speak a chance to present. Morning Hearings take place in the morning, which means they end at noon at the latest. Now, given the flexibility of time in the Court, it could be that it takes hour after hour to reach noon, or it could be that noon seems to sneak up in just a few minutes. Keep an eye on the clock behind the Queen, the bronze one with arrow-shaped hands. That, and only that, keeps the official time for the Court. If speakers are still remaining when the Queen or her representative says time is at an end, then that is it. Speakers do not get to speak, and they cannot carry over their permission to speak to another session. If it is truly urgent that you speak, make sure you are placed early in the speaking order. Bribes seldom work, but favors might.

Given that the Morning Hearings are when the government functions of the Court are most on display, this is not a spot to attempt experiments in etiquette, or to make your first appearance before other courtiers. You are much better served by watching and listening than charging forward.

THE MID-DAY

Once Morning Hearings dismiss, the Court enters its least-structured time, as courtiers find a mid-day meal, discuss the activities of the hearings, and jockey for position at the banquets. Most of the faction halls are occupied at this point, so this is perhaps the best time to contact faction representatives. This is also one of the better times to go exploring the Court, because people are out and about, meaning many rooms are occupied. The chances of stumbling onto some hazard without someone nearby who can help you navigate it are reduced.

Many experienced courtiers use mid-day as a slow time, a time to recharge between morning and evening events. Newer players at Court should not make this mistake. There reams of information to be gathered at this time of day. Who Is talking to whom? Which factions are sending emissaries back and forth between their halls? Who is contacting Court tailors for last-minute modifications to an outfit they desperately need to be impressive? Who is diving into the archives, looking for rare documents? Who is marshaling up an expedition to explore uncharted sections of the structure? All of this can be valuable information, so subtly gathering it can be an extremely profitable way to spend the middle of the day.

Mid-day is also when invitations to evening banquets are secured. Many people have standing invitations, or invitations gained on previous days, but every banquet gives out at least a few invitations just before the meal starts, so competition to impress the proper individuals can be fierce.

THE BANQUETS

While governing is accomplished in the morning, the evening banquets are where the true work of the Court is performed. Impressions are made, alliances are forged, treachery is revealed, and drama of some form or another takes place. Simply observing who is attending which ball can be useful intelligence, which is why many courtiers disguise their appearance until they are in the appropriate location.

The banquets are tiered, a system that allows each level a distinct function. This means that attending a higher tier is not always more desirable—much depends on what you wish to gain from the banquet. The tiers are as follows:

The Queen's Banquet: This is, of course, the top level, as it is where the Queen takes her nightly meal. Her absences from this banquet are quite rare; even when she does not attend Morning Hearings, she generally can be found here, in all but the most extraordinary of circumstances. Her presence, along with the extremely high quality of the food, make this a very desired invitation. It also, though, tends to make for a more formal and solemn occasion than some other banquets, with less of a wild, unpredictable air. There is definite value to being on the Queen's invitation list (for she personally approves all invitations to the banquet), but perhaps less business happens here than any other banquet. Still, to re-iterate the crucial point, the Queen is usually there, and for many people it is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to engage her on something important, making it worth any effort to gain an invitation. With forty slots at the table (ten of those customarily taken by the Queen and those closest to her), there are very few openings at this feast.

The Regency Banquet: This sits just below the Queen's Banquet, and as such is usually attended by an important member of the Court, such as the Steward or the Chief Adviser. The pomp and circumstance is only a hair beneath the Queen's Banquet, making it viewed as an important stepping stone to the top event. It has significant value on its own, though, with excellent food and high-ranking attendees, including at least one faction leader on most occasions. It's a more conversation-filled event than Queen's Banquet, since everyone is not always falling silent waiting to see if the Queen will speak. The minds gathered here tend to be top-notch, and the analysis of Court events provided during the banquet is unparalleled. This is a must for anyone who truly wants to understand the current atmosphere of the Court. Like the Queen's Banquet, it seats forty, but lack of the Queen and her retinue means there are more openings for outsiders.

The Cyprian Banquet: As the last of the one-banquet-only tiers, this serves as an excellent training ground for the top two. Emerging fashion trends are visible here, as are attempted trends that fall flat and lead their designers to disgrace. The gossip level surrounding this banquet is high—it is larger than the top two banquets, with sixty seats, and that broader invitation list means a wider cross-section of attendees. Factions regularly angle to spread information about who performed well at these events and who embarrassed themselves, so Cyprian performance has become a convenient placeholder measure for what faction is on the rise and which is struggling.

Mid-level Banquets: Not everyone can make the top-tier banquets, but most people still have to eat (or they at least enjoy the physical pleasure of the act without experiencing need), and many of those people have a degree of status in the Court. For them, the mid-level banquets exist. These are easier invitations to receive—they have become loosely organized around areas of interest, so if you share an interest and can prove that you have something useful to offer, and invitation can be secured. They typically seat twenty to eighty people per banquet. Some of the notable mid-level banquets include the Feasts of the Fallen, which have an eye on the history of the Court and tend to gravitate toward discussions of unsolved mysteries from the past; the Trickster Buffets, which are wild, undisciplined affairs where the legion of trickster spirits from the Court attempt to one-up each other in pranks; the Silk Truffles, where much of the cutting-edge fashion of the Court is initially conceived; and the Exile's Return, usually hosted by Eclipse faction members, where outsiders to the Court get a chance to learn more about day-to-day Court functions. The number of these banquets is not set, and new ones are formed regularly, while sparsely attended events are shut down.

The Ember Banquets: Most individuals of decent repute, or new arrivals to the Court, can find a place at one of the many mid-level banquets. Of course, not all of the individuals at Court fit this description, and those that don't are still interested in gathering in the evening and perhaps devouring a bite or two of food. For these individuals, the Ember Banquets exist. In these gatherings, you find the disgraced, the outcast, and the has-beens. These are people who tasted at least a small bit of the glory of the Court and lost it, people who were thrown out, tossed aside, and mostly forgotten. Often they earned their fate too well through misdeeds and betrayals, but a few victims of circumstance find their way to these banquets, befuddled at their loss of prestige and determined to reclaim their past promise.

The Ember Banquets are not necessarily a final resting place. The higher banquets have many people who have spent some time down there, people who might have endured a brief but bitter punishment from one faction or another, or people who toiled in obscurity at these feasts for many cycles until they finally received a shot at redemption. This, then, means there are several reasons to spend time among those exiled to this level. They have stories to tell, dirt to dish, closeted skeletons to reveal. They also might be filled with the right combination of untapped potential and smoldering revenge to be a useful weapon if pointed in the right direction. There is information, cautionary tales, and potential allies to find in these far-flung, meager feasts. They should not be ignored.

THE BALLS

While the banquets are the social highlights of each day, they are minor when compared to the most significant events that happen each month, the bright centers of the Court social calendar, the monthly balls where the grace, wit, diplomacy, and treachery of the Court are on full display. When battle plans are made in the Court, this is the ground where those plans will be carried out. This is where courtly wars are fought and won—or lost. The highest fashion, the most gracious manners, and the basest double-dealing are all on display. Factions can make dramatic leaps on the ranking board in a single ball, or plummet into ignominy. Should any hidden factions exist, the common belief is that they would choose to reveal themselves in one of the balls. That is the importance of these events, and the prestige of the actions taken therein.

The number and themes of the balls generally correspond to material plane calendar months, but don't be fooled—the flexible chronology of the Court means a visitor could leave the material plane in the deepest winter and enter a Court deep in the middle of preparations for the Long Heat, or a summer visitor might walk into the middle of the Deadwinter Ball. All of the nations of earth do not experience the same weather at the same time, so there is no reason the balls should correspond to the weather of one particular spot. Also, while there is a general order to the balls, it is not strict; events may slip out of order, or the wait between balls may seem longer than a material plane month, or shorter than a week (but never shorter than two days—that would be unthinkable, to organize a ball that quickly, even when aided by fungible time). As with most things in the Court, temper your expectations about what kind of logic you may encounter, as the rules they employ may not be the ones you hold most dear. Still, though, despite the disorder, these are the events that mark the Court's time. After all, that is what the term "cycle" refers to in the Court as a matter of time—the complete procession of the major balls.

Here, in the order that follows material plane seasons, are the regular balls of the cycle.

The *Deadwinter* Ball features stark beauty, blacks and whites touched with blood-red berries. As the traditional kickoff to the cycle, it is viewed as an opportunity to make an impression without ostentation. The *Greylight Gathering* introduces some warmer tones and a milder atmosphere. But mildness disappears for the *Feast of Hecate*, a wild romp in the vein of ancient fertility celebrations. Nature is celebrated with a bit more grace in the *Robin's Waltz*, with its fruit-based foods and simple dances. The *Lily Gild* offers courtiers the opportunity to go over the top, with fashion and décor that ferociously competes to be the most eye-popping. *Midsummer Night* is a somewhat more convivial gathering, though its traditional romantic tempests make for eventful evenings. *The Gathering of Roses* is the Court at its most graceful, with every element intended to complement the graceful lines of smooth dances. *The Long Heat* swings the pendulum in the other direction, as courtiers let whatever passions have been simmering erupt in one frantic night. The Court dissolves into open violence more on this night than any other. The *Harvest Moon Promenade* is about over-eating, because it seems all cultures must have at least one day where that is the primary objective. The *Red Sun Ball* has a desperate feel, as if it is the commemoration of a looming apocalypse that never quite hits. The *Feast of Conjuring* is the most magical affair of the cycle, with an array of spirits summoned to add an atmosphere unlike any other. The grand finale of the cycle is the *Festival of Lights*, which, based on how factions did the previous year, can be a celebration, a funeral, a breakup, and a revolution all at once.

If you have not found a way to attend one of these balls, you are not truly attending Court. Many invitations go out—most as general admission, but others as special invites to reserved areas, giving those so favored access to people and powers that make them the envy of the Court. Much of the cycle focuses on gaining the proper invitations, and the results generated by a successful ball have frequently demonstrated why this is so.

Learn to Speak Seelie

EXALTED WISDOM BY PORL SANDSTORM

Pay attention and learn from my words, for I enjoy teaching, and in that teaching Iwill reveal what you need to know. I am one who has lived long, and you are one whose time here is short. Learn from me and your time here will be short in the past, but if you don't perhaps your time here will be short in the future, who can say?

But I repeat myself, now or later.

The first step of speaking to Seelie is to speak. But you don't speak our language. But you do speak some language or else you would not be reading these words but instead using whatever the words end up being written on to wipe yesterday's crab apples out of your bottom. Unless you use the electronics of your home plane, but if you do not read this then you might as well use your screens and illusory shapes to wipe your bottom. I say this because it will help you.

You may speak Sperethiel if you wish. You may speak English if you prefer. You may even learn the Court's particular *Béarlagair*. But in Our Plane you may speak what you like, even your Cityspeak, and be understood. And understand. All is magical, especially words. And crab apples. These words I write and you read are magical, for they make my thoughts yours. Remember these things if nothing else.

You know that my people are proud, and they have carried their pride with them for centuries. This you know because I have told you, or will tell you and then you will know. It is said on your plane that pride is a sin, but here it is sacred. Consider the tale of Cáis Gruth, the Honored Adjunct to the Royal Executioner. She insulted some now-forgotten minor noble's pride, and they had to duel. But killing the noble impugned the esteem of his house. And so as a result, she lost face, which was then nailed to a crab apple tree. This insult to her was so great that it demanded retribution. Like a swift kick to an unemptied chamber pot, the shit flowed back and forth and slopped over the sides. Fortunately, it took a short time—only a few centuries—to settle. All of us hold in our blood and bone the lesson you have only now just learned by reading this story.

I say for the first time that I do not mean to say that you should not insult us. True creatures of pride are disdainful of the pride of others. In oneself it is esteem, in others vainglory. If your words never carry disdain for anyone, you will never be taken seriously in the Court.

I tell you these things to help you. Because if you wish to speak to the fae, you must first get our attention. For some, it is enough that you are what you are, a mundane creature from a mundane realm. Some of us will be fascinated with you, and want to know who you are, or what you think, or where you are from, or how you taste, and these you may speak to in peace, often. Some will ignore you for what you are, a mundane creature from a mundane realm. They will not engage you, preferring to treat you as they would someone else's pet, and these (should you decide to speak to them) must be shown that you are worthy of their attention. Some of us are enamored with you, or the idea of you, and will seek to seduce you or to ask to be taken back to your mysterious home where they can be with you for eternity, and these are the most dangerous to you. Some will see you as tools, to use or use up as they require, and these are the most useful to you. Learn these things.

I say again that I do not mean to say that you should not insult us. Quite the opposite, for it is the greatest means of getting our attention. Indeed, you must insult us if you are to earn our courtesy. You must slight us or be seen as a simpering nincompoop. In your world, respect is earned and courtesy is due, and in ours it is contrariwise. Approach all with respect, and save courtesy for what friends you may find. Unless you are a simpering nincompoop—then you can speak kindly to all you meet.

Weave your insults with kind words. Milord, your strength is unparalleled in this small chamber. I could tell that you worked hard on that song, milady. Your Excellency, I look forward to seeing your gifts in action some day. I do love how you can wear just about anything.

You will be so insulted. Constantly. Every day. Every word. If you listen to me, you will learn. My words, these words I write to you, are insulting, but you do not see the insult. I speak plainly, as might a company man of your plane, but you do not understand the obloquy I weave while I teach you what you need to know. Or perhaps you have, and you have wisely set my slight aside. I show my clever mind by wrapping the poisoned pill in sweetmeats, and you show yours by eating only the candy and discreetly discarding the venom in your napkin. Or you are a simpering nincompoop, which I say to describe you and certainly not to insult you. This is our way.

But your insults will not always be at Court. Your kind likes to make deals and haggle with your Mister Johnsons and talk bumpkins into aiding you. Milord, I am honored that you think we could scrape a living on such a low payment. It was foolish of me to ask of you something so difficult. Even in the face of gossips and scandalmongers, Your Honor is wise to be so frugal in his generosity.

I tell you these things to help you, but it is not yet enough. To you we are mysterious. To us you are intriguing. And nutritious. To us, we are mysterious as well.

We are a people woven of secrets and intrigues. Our artifice is made of riddles, and our enigmas formed of machinations. All these things are things that you are not. We truly like it that way, I have never thought to consider why until I met you.

We keep our intentions in the same place we keep our kidneys, deep inside and somewhat toward the back. We do this because we love our Pride, and Pride is the child of Father Dignity and Mother Prestige. We must raise up ourselves in the Court and in the eyes of all. We must strike down our enemies, or raise them up to make the striking down all the sweeter. We must be adored above and feared below.

To be all these things we create stratagems and set them in motion, which must be kept secret or not at all. Plans in the open spoil as quickly as curd in the summertime. I don't think you send your plans to your enemies before you execute them, do you? Before you execute your plans, I mean, not before you execute your enemies. Or perhaps I do mean both in my heart.

And so you must not tip your hand when discussing your desires. If we know your desire, we might seek to thwart you out of spite, or capriciousness, or to further our own intrigues. Or worse, we might take it upon ourselves to help you. Your intentions must be obscured, especially when you seek us out in trade.

In your realm, you make your deals plain. You put your exchanges to the pen, or the pixel, even in the shadows where no records are kept. Here we dare not be so open. And so it is better for you, vital to some, that you know what your prospective partner wants before you approach. We do not have currency, and so your work is cut out for you.

It is inadvisable to simply ask the Seelie what they want. If you stop to consider, you will see why. You are demanding that a courtier reveal themselves, even if it is only in some small way. Rudeness. Moreover, you are broadcasting your own desires to any there to hear. You may wonder what harm may come of a single, small question, but don't forget that you are among minds ancient and subtle, who may divine your intentions beyond the scope of your simple question. I already know many of your intentions, simply because you are reading what I have written here, to help you.

Perhaps this will help you understand our ways. I know a minor noble who you do not, but for our purposes we will call him Níos clog Bó, Second Thane of Droustre. He was speaking to a noble you do not know who we shall call Majestica.

"What a lovely spring we are having, Majestica," said Níos.

"Quite lovely, indeed, milord. I hear that your lands are blooming," she said in reply.

"Indeed, my largest pasture is practically overgrowing," he said, "so much so that I prefer to walk the lavender-scented dungeons over riding in the field."

"Lavender is a pleasant odor. Perhaps I should decorate my own dungeons with its perfume."

"You would find it sweet. Perhaps you could compare it to my fields when they are new-mown."

"I look forward to it," said Majestica.

And so the exchange was agreed upon. Each would later command their servants to make the necessary deliveries, and no one was the wiser. Almost no one. Perhaps more, if you can fathom their speech. Read this and learn, for I am here to help you.

Do not fear to attempt to deal with the Seelie if you have nothing they want, or nothing that you know they want. It is true that while we barter, we do not have currency, but we do trade in a currency, and that currency is known as obligation. We encode that obligation in munera, but the social obligation is the core of that currency. The Seelie Court trades favors among themselves with abandon. The Unseelie Court trades favors as well, assuming it exists. They trade among themselves and one another. A market of obligations, a tapestry of connections between nobles of social threads and marks of munera.

If you believe that the favor of a mundane creature such as yourself is undesirable, then you are quite mistaken. Such favors are like delightful trinkets, or perhaps beautiful kitchen utensils. They are a delight to hold, and even prestigious in the right circles. Cunning fae will use them quite effectively. But foolish ones

will discard them when they tarnish, rust, or lose their delight, and so be wary always. As I have taught you.

Do you want to be beholden to a Seelie noble? Oh yes, you do. Very much. Being in debt to a courtier is better than having them as an ally. The foolish ones will show you off. The clever ones will use you to create leverage. All will protect their investment. But be careful of whom you choose to offer favors, o ye who runs in shadows. Remember that I will tell you or have told you that nothing is as it seems. Even if you find that strange mental aberrant who you can trust, you cannot stop them from lending your favor to one of their allies. Or their enemies. Or your enemies.

When you exchange favors, do not forget what you have learned about making deals in the Seelie Court. If you speak openly about the giving and receiving of favors, others will know about them. Do not mistake favors for intrigues. If you have courtly standing, or esteem in the eyes of one of the factions, then your favors bring prestige to those who hold them. But if the fae to whom you are to become beholden wishes to use you or your favor in their own machinations, being open with your favors may do them harm. If you do not know the state of affairs that surround your trading partner, it is best to follow their lead.

I have told you to be wary, or I will tell you later. The Seelie rarely do anything out of affection or kindness. Among the inhuman, expect no humanity. Or perhaps metahumanity. Beware in your dealings with the fae, for you could agree to owe one a favor and realize it only when they come calling for you to settle your debt. It could come in any form, small kindnesses, gifts, information, advice, introductions to the powerful, aid, wealth, forgiveness. Of course, I teach you for my own pleasure, so you do not owe me any favors for writing this that you read now.

This reminds me about lies. Lies are seen in the heart of our realm as weakness. Deception is used by the weak to defend themselves against the strong. Lies are churlish and uncivilized, disgusting to everything we hold dear. So of course they are used on a regular basis. But to be caught in a lie is to be disgraced. The false noble who lies is disdained by both Courts and their peers. They are considered weak for their dishonesty.

Think long and hard before you choose to lie in our realm, metahuman child. I am certain you fear that if you do, you may be chained, or banished, or executed, or worse made into chattel. But I tell you now because I am a teacher that your fate will be worse than all of those combined. They will ignore your indiscretion.

You are surprised. Perhaps confused. Perhaps annoyed. Perhaps amused. If you are amused, then you are a good student.

The courtiers do not take note of the weaknesses of others. Nor should you, if you want to remain safe on our plane of existence. It would be a blatant insult to point out the weakness of someone higher than yourself in rank. And noticing that weakness in a place where others can witness your attention is the same as bringing that weakness to the attention of all present. It would be beneath you to allude to the weakness of your enemy or your inferior as well, and so would bring your prestige down. Keep your composure, my mortal students, when seeing weakness.

Of course, you should most certainly exploit that weakness. Unless you want them to owe you. Or you no longer want to owe them. But do not twist that knife openly. Be subtle. Be respectful. Be fae. As fae as you can.

All that I have told you is what you need to do, but you do not yet understand how to do it. This I will also teach you, for I am wise and you will learn well.

I have told you to be respectful to every one you meet in my realm. Do not assume that respect in your rigid and stagnant culture is the same as it is in the Seelie Court. Many of my kind value deference, it is true, but some abhor it. Baroness Brynwather is livid when no one laughs at her jokes, but the Marquis D'Aberjoine takes great pride in his complete lack of wit and has been known to imprison and flay those who find his humor amusing. The entire Balukinri clan are constantly distracted, and feel insulted if you do not repeatedly remind them to focus on the conversation at hand. In great contrast, Archgraff Eulenschirm once removed the head of a servant who saved his life from an assassination attempt and wore it on his belt for seven cycles as a warning to all that they are to be polite when requesting that the Archgraff "get down."

These are extremes, rare examples in the Seelie Court that you may never encounter. But they are intended to frighten you, because I care about my students. Many of my people will forgive your gaucherie, but never more than thrice, and they will extract a favor from you for it.

I told you or I will tell you that knowledge is power. That you cannot deal with the Court by asking them what they want, but that you must know what they want if you are to deal with the Seelie. There are many paths to the information you need, and I will teach you to use some of them.

The first is to use the ears that you were gifted by your parents. Or that you purchased with your soul. Listen to the court gossip, to casual conversations, and to decrees made in the Court. Take care not to ask directly, for that will reveal your intentions. But if you listen closely, and discern the meaning of the conversations around you, and perhaps you might learn that a prisoner was once traded for a herd of cattle.

If you have a certain set of skills, or can gain the favor of one who has the skills, then perhaps you can find and take your information from the coimeádaí of the one with whom you seek to trade. The Keepers of the Court are vulnerable to certain mortals, but be wary, for they are not poorly defended. Be sure not to be caught using this method, that you call slashing? No, hacking. Hacking is quite the affront to your target, and will make dealing with them all the more difficult. Unless they are impressed or amused by your work.

Easiest is to barter the information from another fae who knows what your intended trading partner wants. Of course, this knowledge will not come freely, and so you must know what the other fae wants in exchange for it. Soon you may find that you have traded the same way I once did when I was very young, a tunic for lambswool and lambswool for gemstones and gemstones for the dress size of the Grand Mistress of Ildorette and the dress size of the Grand Mistress for one day of my greatest joy and one day of my greatest joy for two troll baby teeth and two troll baby teeth for the information that I sought.

To you this might seem twisted, a pointless and painful process to find nothing more than information. But it is by far the easiest way find to knowledge in the Seelie Court, and the most advantageous. Behold that in all my bartering, I made connections with no less than seven courtiers! This is how you succeed in the court of the fae, and become a noble, and then esteemed, and then a judge, and finally a teacher.

And so have I been your teacher, and you have learned from me. And I will continue to teach you, and you will continue to learn from me. No greater honor, yes?

People of the Court

LADY BRANE DEIGH

A fairy appeared before a young Brane Deigh at the slope in Roscommon named Mullach na Sidhe and informed the child Brane that she was a changeling. The fairy said that because Brane was no less her parents' daughter that day than she was the day before, the fairy couldn't bring her to the realm of the fae. The fairy promised she would stay by Brane's side, however, and would visit Brane throughout her upbringing to teach her the secret magics of the fae.

As promised, the Connaught fairy visited Brane regularly throughout her childhood. Little by little, Brane learned the ancient magics promised, each birthday heralding a new advancement in her skill. By the time Brane entered high school, however, the visits stopped, and Brane began to doubt herself and her memories. Although she tried to remember by studying the fairy realms, adolescence and the pressure to prepare for adulthood pulled her away. By the time Brane left for college in Limerick, she had dismissed the entire encounter as a figment of her overly active imagination, designed by her child's brain to explain away her Awakening. That is when I found her and pledged to usher her into a new phase of her magical training.

My Lady Brane was gracious enough to allow me to take over her training, and I have helped to guide her along the Path of the Rígh—which originated aeons ago among our kind. I helped her find her worldly mentor, her magic, and her way home, to stand among you. In her short time among us here at Court, she has demonstrated herself to be an impeccable example of everything we expect from our sovereign. The voices that speak in support of her ascending to Queen are those of the most well-respected and admired members of Court.

I bid you all join me in kneeling before your new Queen, the Lady Brane Deigh.

- Aoifhill, Fae-in-Waiting to the Lady Brane Deigh, Coronation Address.

More rumors than ladies-in-waiting revolve around her, although it is a close contest as to which number is greater. From who will design her next ball costume to her species, many claim to know many true facts about the Lady, but few actually do. As Queen of the Seelie Court, the Lady Brane Deigh often seems more myth than reality.

Lady Brane Deigh appears elven. When her lady-in-waiting, Aoifhill, during an introductory speech at Deigh's coronation, revealed that although Lady Brane Deigh was raised as an elf in Tír na nÓg, Deigh is actually a changeling, the proclamation shocked the Seelie Court, particularly the elven members thereof. Several rumors persist that the Queen's announcement was nothing but a ploy to win fae support of her monarchy and that she is indeed an elf; they point to the fact that there was no response whatsoever from officials in Tír na nÓg. However, most of her subjects accepted the news with pleasure. Whispers of closed-door meetings between the Tír elite and the Queen soon after her coronation suggest that the news was not accepted so readily as the Tír silence suggested, but the idea of this causing new friction between them gained no traction. A few continue to grumble quietly about the Queen's seemingly indeterminate race, but few disagree with her right to rule.

The ascension to Queen derives from an ancient ceremony by which the sovereign was chosen based on the example the candidate demonstrates, rather than an outward display of power. Lady Brane Deigh's ascension to Queen was no exception to this tradition. Many highly regarded members of Court spoke on behalf of Deigh and pledged their support for her coronation. So many, in fact, that some wondered in hushed tones whether magic or pure politics were utilized. It turns out, however, that neither were at play; Deigh is simply a master at social interaction.

Lady Brane Deigh possesses a remarkable mind for people and for social tactics and strategies. On several occasions she has demonstrated an uncanny ability to manipulate threads running through the social network of Court, over the course of years, to ensure her plans come to fruition. Her talent with people is so great that sources close to the Queen expressed some confusion—out of her earshot, of course—when Renraku won a contract to conduct the census project; the Queen has always known precisely who is who in her realm. Some could see no reason to involve another party—a foreign party at that—in identifying and recording the makeup of the Seelie Court. The overriding opinion on the matter, as it is with most matters involving the Queen, is that she stands to gain from the contract in some capacity unknown to any but herself.

Well-placed as ruler of a people who pride themselves on their ability to make war with words, the Queen is a master diplomat. Regardless of the individual and the subject, anyone conversing with the Queen notices first that her regard is complete, an oddity among individuals of her station. She also has a unique talent for setting her conversation partners at ease with the impression that whatever subject they discuss is the most important thing to her in the present moment. Despite her position and the accompanying never-ending cries for her notice, she grants people her full attention, to the point where people often believe the Queen is allied with them. Such belief should seem foolhardy, especially when representatives of multiple sides of an argument walk away from conversation with the Queen believing the same, but the impression persists. Some walk away from conversation only to realize later that the Queen successfully talked them into a compromise of some sort. Those who deal with the Queen will usually make deals that benefit the Seelie Court, whether they initially realize it or not.

The Queen is as comfortable wielding the stick as she is wielding the carrot. Several pronouncements from without the Court's borders have made it necessary to ensure all know where she stands when it comes to supporting any party in foreign lands: The Seelie Court supports no one outside its borders. As with all matters, the Queen remains graceful and eloquent in her presentation—the gentling of her diplomatic skills has become her greatest strength in recent years—but none need question her message when she delivers it. Whether good news or ill, the Queen lets her opinions be known.

Even when silent, the Queen of the Seelie Court wields what some have called a compelling presence. She is tall, lithe, and fair-haired, with eyes that seem to shift in color from a bright green to a pale blue, a trait that supports Aoifhill's proclamation that the Lady is fae. In a land of widespread beauty, magic, and illusions, it is unlikely that her appearance alone results in her presence. More likely it is due to the time spent with and lessons learned from her mentor. All accounts of her mentor, the Lady Alachia, reveal her as a strict and hard-edged instructor possessing the same social skill and

charismatic aura. Her mentor, also reputed to possess a high position within Tír na nÓg, has yet to react to the news delivered during Lady Brane's coronation, further adding to rumors that the news was simply a stunt.

For some, the idea that a fairy taught Lady Brane before the Lady's ascent to leadership and mentorship by the Tír elite is comforting. Other fae have bristled at their monarchy consisting largely of elves. The evidence that their new Queen learned the ways of their world from a native has largely calmed their concerns, but many still wonder who Aoifhill is. Little reliable information is known. Aoifhill has stood nearby since the beginning of Lady Brane's time in the Seelie Court, though she was overlooked—considered merely a lady-in-waiting—until her speech. Aoifhill is not seen outside the Queen's presence, and the Queen does not tolerate the questioning of her servants. In the absence of further information, two opinions have developed in Court regarding Aoifhill's proclamation. Those who believe it is true point out that the Queen—and by extension, her subjects—has been blessed with the best of both educations: that of ancient elven traditions as well as of traditions unique to the fae. Those who believe the statement is a ploy for support question the Queen's motives in holding up an unknown fae as her instructor, let alone in falsifying her bloodline. Regardless of the truth of the matter, the fairy Aoifhill remains elusive, but it is clear she plays a major role in advising the Queen.

Lady Brane maintains an impressive collection of artifacts, including the Sword of Nuada (Airgetlám); the Loom of Uonaidh, an odd name given to a pendant the Queen wears constantly; and a set of cards bequeathed to her in Dunkelzahn's will and said to confer divinatory powers (arguments persist whether some or all of them are part of the Sixth World Tarot). Arguably, the most important artifacts to the Court are the Arcana, a set of objects of power said to grant the spiritual and mystical power and authority to rule the Court. Many believe that the Queen is a powerful mystic adept, though none but she know for sure, as her aura-obscuring powers are considerable. Others have hypothesized that it is Lady Brane's obsession with powerful artifacts that uncovers either her lust for power (reputedly passed down from her mentor) or her weak magical power. All that is known for certain of the Queen's learned and inherent magic is that she has the knowledge and talent to wield powerful sorcery. Any other ideas as to her magical talents cannot be verified; the Queen operates under powerful masking metamagic at all times. Any spell

effects on the Queen bear her astral signature—indeed, for another to cast at the Queen would be grounds for the caster's immediate arrest and certain execution. However, with the right magical ability, some whisper, the signature could be faked. Such doubts only fuel the rumors surrounding the Queen, which range from the absurd to the destructive.

For an idea of the absurd, consider the distressingly persistent rumor that the Queen is a member of the Vigilante faction. Ridiculous as the idea may sound, a few insist that the Queen must have knowledge of the faction's supposed dissolution and reprimand her failure to act. They believe that this inaction highlights the truth that she is a part of an elaborate plot to reap revenge on those who demolished the faction. The Queen has refused to acknowledge their dogged claims, and the only words on the subject her Steward has offered is that "The notion is ludicrous."

However, the most absurd and most potentially destructive rumor surrounding the Queen revolves around an incident from two years ago. A púca by the name of Pachelbel created a stir at Court when he arrived at Court, wide-eyed and anxious, to feverishly and loudly insist that the Queen had a double. Not simply a double, but a shadowy double. Pachelbel claimed until the day of his execution that he saw the "Queen-in-Shadow" in lands where it is rumored the Unseelie dwell. The púca was arrested and beheaded for his outburst and insult, but the idea spread. A small group of individuals clung to the story and persist in telling it to this day. Every few months the group, who call themselves the Agents of Clarity, disseminates information among members of Court, stating the Queen is not who or what she claims to be, that she is neither fae nor elf, but something else. They insist that two facts support their claim: first, the Queen has been seen on several occasions to engage in conversation with someone who is not visible to anyone, not even via astral space, and that she regularly seems as though she is listening to someone removed from her immediate surroundings. Second, that the Seelie Court and the Unseelie Court remain continually in balance despite each side's wish to eradicate the other. The Agents insist that the only way this is feasible is if the ruling parties always know of the others' plans. The vast majority dismiss the Agents as insane. The Agents of Clarity have so far eluded capture, and it is said the Queen has sent agents after them.

Though varied and persistent, the whispers and uncertainties dwindle in the face of her support, and despite the rumors, the Queen rules a satisfied populace. Her leadership, her social skill, and her grace continue to inspire her subjects to this day.

Lady Brane Deigh

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	Edge	Mag
3	4	5(8)	3	6	6	6	7	6	8

Condition Monitor: 10
Armor: 9
Limits: Physical 5(6), Mental 8, Social 9(12)
Physical Initiative: 11(14) + 1(4)D6
Skills: Arcana 9, Archery 5, Assensing 9, Astral Combat 6, Athletics skill group 4, Blades 4, Computer 2, Con 6, Conjuring skill group 9, Enchanting skill group 5, Etiquette 11 (Elven +2), First Aid 4, Intimidation 8, Medicine 3, Negotiation 10, Outdoors skill group 5, Perception 6, Sorcery skill group 11, Stealth skill group 9
Qualities: Exceptional Attribute (Charisma), Focused Concentration (5), Spirit Affinity (beasts), Toughness
Initiate Grade: 10 (ally conjuration, centering, extended masking, flexible signature, flux, masking, reflection, shielding, spell shaping)
Spells: Functionally all, but favoring Detection, Illusion, and Manipulation
Adept Powers: Attribute Boost (Agility), Improved Ability (Negotiation) [3], Improve Potential (Social) [2], Improved Reflexes [3], Kinesics [2], Mystic Armor [2], Natural Immunity [3], Spell Resistance [2]
Gear: Emerald ring (Power focus, Rating 4), Nightshade/Moonsilver gown
Weapons: Ornate dagger [Blade, Acc 6, Reach —, DV 5P, AP -3, weapon focus (3)]

CHIEF ADVISER TO THE QUEEN

Among the youngest of the Court's high-ranking officials, Magister Alessius Vyperalyn has only been attending Court for a few decades. His rise to a position of such power and influence in such a short time is a tribute to his skill at playing the games of Court and his willingness to work with every faction in order to get ahead.

The Magister is an elf, born to the material plane. In his fortieth (or so) year of life, he took his first steps across the threshold into the Seelie Court and has rarely returned to the plane that spawned him. He took to the

games and subterfuge of Court life like a guresh to water, quickly earning a spot as a regular emissary for Higher Power, where he began to build his first power base. With their support behind him and his recent existence on the material plane, he made several inroads for efforts to create a stronger bond between the two.

Current rumors fly about his possible involvement in the Yellowstone Calamity, especially considering his family ties. He has an unclaimed brother, Lysander (a twin, according to the most fervent rumors), who still lives on the material plane and operates as a shadowrunner throughout the Pacific Northwest. Efforts are regularly made to try to connect the activity of one to the other with varying levels of success, depending on which likely embellished series of story you choose to believe. Actual evidence of a connection is difficult to find. Neither of these two are forthcoming with information, and to most viewers, their lives appear connected only by their DNA and family name.

The Court politics of Magister Vyperalyn are interesting and varied. His rapid rise came with a significant munera debt, but his current political agenda seems to carry little in the way of outside influence. A small number of courtiers believes that his supporters are being cowed in some way, while the vast majority are waiting for his collapse as all the strings he has tied to himself are pulled in varied directions.

As unfavorably as many look upon this new rift of access, Alessius has long been working to increase connections to the material plane in order to plunder the physical and magical wealth it offers. In the eyes of many, the material plane is full of ignorant mundanes and simple physical beings, but the rising mana, ever-shifting lines of power, and growing Awakened population offer a developing source of resources for the Court. His efforts have shown little progress, but his rank and authority continue to grow.

What surprises many is that while he is advisor to the Queen, the Aes Sidhe Banrigh have shown no support for his cause and continue to promote isolation from influences that may corrupt the traditions and culture of the Court. Along with that, the Queen's Champion, Lord Serrin Sol, is Alessius' greatest opponent. The grumpy old elf works to undermine and subvert every bit of support the Magister provides. Most consider the bitter rivalry a battle for the Queen's favor between her hunting hound and lap dog, but nothing is ever so simple in the Seelie Court. As it stands court watchers feel Alessius is simply tossing out trivial support during Court proceedings to keep Serrin occupied swatting flies while his true efforts continue to grow more successful behind closed doors.

Beyond the inner circle of the Queen, Magister Vyperalyn has considerable influence within the faction from which he rose, the Higher Power. That influence has been strained with his position on connections to the material plane, and forces within Higher Power have likely been working against him, while he uses their name and influence to advance his agenda.

The veils of mystery and secrecy are thick when one speaks of Magister Alessius and most of the other factions, but his support and connections can be found if one simply knows where to look. Several layers of intermediary act to buffer the Magister from immediate repercussions and allow him to channel any remaining advantage into other efforts.

His most open secret alliance (or perhaps more appropriately, "secret" alliance) is with those who ally with Eclipse. He builds connections to members who lean heavily toward extending the influence of the Court—especially those who seek to keep that influence unseen as it spreads in the shadows of the material plane.

Unravelling the knots before the strings connecting the Magister and his supporters are severed has become a particular pastime of aspiring courtiers who think knocking him down a peg will help to lift them up. His rumored connections include Death, Comet, and Bastard. All too often their efforts become so tangled that the plots they eventually unravel are their own, implicating themselves in their web of treachery without turning up anything solid to use against the Magister. The new access to shadowrunners and assets from the material plane that Court members can use as extra pawns in ongoing games could be interesting for Vyperalyn's future. He will certainly be eager to use these tools, but if they are turned against him, he could be setting up his own doom.

Despite his leanings for change, the Magister finds staunch support from the Dragon. His own arcane prowess earned him early respect and access to many Dragon allies. These ties have been strained of late, though not as strongly as those with supporters of the Higher Power. Arcanist elves cannot act superior unless they have someone to be superior to.

As is the case with so many others, nothing tangible connects Magister Alessius to the Unseelie Court, but speculations find their way to him too often to

completely ignore. Most often his material connections generate the most concern, though his alliance with Eclipse convinces some that he is merely wishing to alter the shape of the Court rather than overthrow it. Still, he is reputed to be seeking the Turnkey of Rust, and all in the Court know that such an object would never be used for stability.

As a final point, Magister Alessius, while a pretentious prick in most Court engagements and a braggart during balls and festivals, has no stomach for violence. Yet somehow it manages to follow him like a storm cloud. Rare outbursts from struggling courtiers who succumb to their baser natures often cause him to disgorge his most recently consumed meal in a flagrantly unmannerly display. This has helped to both soften and strengthen the rumors that swirl each time death (the event, not the faction) finds one of those who question or oppose him openly. He is never directly connected to the acts of violence, but rumors still connected them to him. Some think these are the acts of Alessius' allies within Higher Power, others whisper of his brother slipping through the shadows into the Court, and still more look to the Comet, Death, or Eclipse factions as forces seeking to change the status quo by playing out the Magister's machinations.

Magister Allesius Vyperalyn, Advisor to the Queen

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	Edge	Ess	Mag
3	4	4(6)	3	7	9	8	8(12)	6	4.1	8

Condition Monitor: 10/12
Armor: 8
Limits: Physical 5, Mental 11, Social 9(12)
Physical Initiative: 12(14) + 1D6(3D6)
Skills: Arcana 8, Archery 2, Artisan 3, Athletics skill group 3, Chemistry 2, Close Combat skill group 2, Computer 2, Con 8 (Fast-talking +2), Conjuring skill group 6, Enchanting skill group 6, Etiquette 7 (Seelie Court +2), Firearms skill group 2, Leadership 6, Medicine 2, Negotiation 10, Perception 5, Sorcery skill group 8, Stealth skill group 8, Throwing Weapons 2
Qualities: Analytical Mind, Common Sense, Exceptional Attribute (Willpower), Linguist, Perceptive, Rank (Seelie Court) 3, Trustworthy
Initiate Grade: 6
Spells/Rituals: Agony, Alter Memory, Analyze Magic, Analyze Truth, Armor, Astral Message, Awaken, Clout, Control Actions, Decrease Charisma, Decrease Reaction, Decrease Reflexes, Decrease Willpower, Deflection, Double Image, Fireball, Heal, Improved Invisibility, Increase Charisma, Increase Reflexes, Levitate, Lightning Ball, Lightning Bolt, Mindnet, Mind Probe, Physical Mask, Reinforce, Secret Handshake, Shadow, Sight Removal, Silence, Sound Barrier
Metamagics: Absorption, Astral Bluff, Centering, Masking, Quickening, Shielding
Augmentations: Attention co-processor, cerebellum booster 2, cerebral booster 3, math SPU, tailored pheromones (2)
Gear: Magister's vestments (AR 6), Ring of Foresight (AR +2), snake staff [Sustaining focus: Head (Health, Force 4, Increase Charisma 4), eyes (Manipulation, Force 6, Deflection 6), coiled body (Health, Force 4, Increase Reflexes 4)]
Weapons: Snake staff [Club, Acc 6, Reach 2, DV 6P, AP –]

NIALL O'CONNOR, UNSEELIE COURT OPERATIVE

They call him the distant cousin, that damned mortal, the dirty O'Connor, the dissident, and that bastard—never The Bastard, of course—when they're particularly frustrated with him. The courtiers aren't particularly kind to Niall O'Connor, and Niall O'Connor doesn't particularly care. The mortal and his ally spirit Mathanas have been regulars at formal Court functions for decades, and invariably Niall can be found playing the devil's advocate every time he visits. His is the clearly ringing voice of dissent every time he opens his mouth, a truism that holds whether in the Seelie Court or back home among the elves of Tír na nÓg.

Niall O'Connor is a mortal. An elf, born into one of the Tír's ruling Danaan Families and a magician of tremendous potential, he has every reason to wallow in privilege and love the elven nation and its government that has rested him so gently in the lap of luxury. But he does not. Contrary by nature, more compassionate than most in the Sixth World, well aware of his luck and of how that same luck eluded so many others, O'Connor has long railed against the political system of Tír na nÓg, the exploitative nature of it, and the privileged few that reap so many benefits from the ignored masses. He has not walked gently along the Ways and Paths on his way to being acknowledged as a Righ—no, he has stomped angrily the entire way, kicking stones along with him, tripping his fellows, and elbowing his

way to the front of the pack despite their best efforts. His position with Renraku *Eireann-Tír* is almost entirely symbolic, and it leaves him with tremendous free time to while away on studying and writing arcane guides, rubbing elbows with entirely the wrong sort on deep-Matrix datahavens, and overseeing—rumors insist—insurgent training at his remote farm or other, more secret, properties. In the mortal realm, he is entirely an advocate for anti-Tír organizations, a rabble rouser, a giver of speeches, and a generous financial donor to groups known to desire destabilization of the Tír way of life. He is a master at abusing the Tír system while railing against its abusive nature.

In the Seelie Court, behind a wry smirk, he seems to be much the same.

Niall runs counter to the wishes of the Court, but never quite to its laws. He knows well the spirit of the Seelie rules and contorts them at every opportunity, much to the irritation of a great many of his nominal peers. Niall O'Connor has two great gifts to offer the two worlds he lives in: the ability to rouse ire at the drop of a hat, and the ability to never quite be the one seen dropping that hat. His knack for causing trouble is second only to his knack for avoiding it. His ability to dodge fallout is, quite literally, the stuff of legend, and only whispers and accusations—baseless rumors—tie him to any Unseelie operation. O'Connor is a juggler at heart, able to keep so many plots and schemes moving (while only barely touching them) that blaming him is as fruitless as it is infuriating.

He is never directly responsible for anything, it seems, in either the mortal realm or among the fae. When poachers were caught preparing to cross over into the metaplanes for a daring safari, though they were using a path he regularly treads, even the Steward couldn't detect any lie from Niall as he rejected any connection. When smugglers used those same secret paths to steal fae plants and turn them into dangerous hallucinogens that were all the rage in upper-crust Tír parties, Niall's hands were spotlessly clean. When stockpiles of stolen Seelie-forged arms were found in his own barn's loft, reputedly an armory lain aside for Unseelie knaves, O'Connor inverted the investigation to show that one of the Queen's knights had gone rogue and planted them, seeking to gain glory by finally bringing Niall to face Seelie law. Always, invariably, O'Connor isn't ever quite to blame for the chaos that follows in his wake. He stands, instead, eminently comfortable at the eye of the storm, with his bespoke suit unruffled by the howling winds that threaten all around him—and Mathanas hovering protectively nearby.

Only the Lady Brane knows why the rogue is allowed—invited!—to the Court, and only the Lady Brane can revoke that invitation. That she has not done so is a great a frustration to O'Connor's detractors, but they never quit trying. Their fingers keep pointing, their tongues keep wagging, and their attention invariably stays fixed on the rumored Unseelie agent; which is, perhaps, his secret value to the Lady. For all that he frustrates her Stewards, and for all that her courtiers and the nobles complain incessantly of O'Connor's reputed doings, there is something about him that keeps him welcome in her Court, and his worth as a distraction and a unifying external irritant is as likely a reason as any others.

There are rumors, of course, that O'Connor isn't truly welcome, and that his travels from the mortal world to the fae realm have little to do with the Queen's favor. She tolerates him, such rumors insist, but her feigned politeness is a cover for her inability to bar him from the timeless realms of the Court. None would dare accuse the Lady Brane of such weakness out loud, of course, nor would any expect an honest answer from Niall if they pressed him, so the rumors stay whispered only, and invariably with worried glances about for Unseelie spies.

Invited to do so or not, it is known that O'Connor's ability to cross between worlds is second to few. The bearer of the Ring of Truth, bequeathed him from Dunkelzahn's own horde, Niall has either learned how to tap the prophetic ability of that artifact into a reliable way to step back and forth from fae to mortal realms, or has some other items of power that expedite the process. Such is his mastery of the journey, such is his acclimation to the timeless realms of the Seelie Court, that he has even seemed to be in both places at once; some secret power may have allowed him to exploit the flexible chronology of the Court in order to be all the more cunning, all the more flawless a schemer, back in his mortal home (or Mathanas may simply be uncannily able to mimic him, often continuing Niall's work in the Tír while his summoner is away at Court).

Niall O'Connor, Unseelie Court Operative

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	Ess	Mag
4	4	4	3	6	6	6	6	6	10

Condition Monitor: 10
Armor: 9
Limits: Physical 4, Mental 8, Social 6
Physical Initiative: 10 + 1D6
Skills: Arcana 8, Assensing 7, Astral Combat 6, Athletics skill group 3, Blades 3 (Swords +2), Computer 3, Con 5, Conjuring skill group 8, Enchanting skill group 5, Etiquette 7 (Elven +2), First Aid 4, Forgery 5, Intimidation 5, Locksmith 4, Negotiation 6, Outdoors skill group 4, Perception 6, Pistols 4, Sorcery skill group 9, Stealth skill group 6
Qualities: Astral Chameleon, Focused Concentration (4), Poor Link, Privileged Family Name
Initiate Grade: 6 (ally conjuration, centering, danger sense, flexible signature, masking, shielding)
Spells: Functionally all, but favoring Detection, Illusion, and Manipulation
Gear: Synergist Business Suit, The Ring of Truth (Force 6 Power Focus, among other abilities), a physical replica of The Ring of Truth (Force 4 Spellcasting: Illusion Focus), an assortment of magical trinkets

STEWARD OF THE COURT

There are not, as a rule, a great many mortals who have been invited to live safely among the fae. Fewer still were corporate attorneys. There has only ever been a single Saito. Fiona Saito, who bears the Blue and the Gold and stands at the right hand of the Queen herself, is a remarkable exception.

Only a few short years ago, she was a mystic adept on the material plane, a hermetic of some small ability, a follower of the path of Stewards, and a young judge living comfortably in Dublin thanks initially to the patronage of Renraku *Éireann-Tír*. Born of mixed parents and straight into the corporate life, she was a remarkable student, a hard worker, a burgeoning poet, a talented calligraphist, and a regional champion Judoka. Fiona was also brilliant in the courtroom. Compromise was her forte, balance was her passion, negotiation her true martial art. Blessed with a silver tongue that matched her golden mind, she made enough of a name for herself that her parent company granted her some leeway, allowing her to work privately on the side. Eventually, she made enough a name for herself that she worked

her way out from under Renraku, and served as a *fo-brehon*, a magistrate in the Tír courts.

And she made enough of a name for herself that when two mortal instruments of timeless fae patrons found themselves in need of legal counsel, it was Fiona Saito they approached.

Going before her for impartial counsel, they presented her with a case that could have been argued as a matter of hunting rights, property rights, the possession of a controlled substance, the possession of a firearm, trespassing while carrying a bladed weapon greater than ten centimeters in length, attempted murder, and—eventually—arson. The short form involved a drunken cattle raid turned into a bit of a fight, and ended with a torched outhouse and wounded dignity. The long form involved Fiona Dawson being approached to serve as an impartial third party after hours—no jury, no paperwork, no mundane attention. Catspaws of the Aes Sidhe Banrigh and the Higher Power, alone in an office with Fiona, left dazzled.

She, put simply, talked circles around the both of them, and left them not only satisfied with her uncanny knack at smoothing over their dispute, but rivals again. This time, they were competing for her, rather than cattle and pride.

Rumors of this remarkable young elf filtered back to ageless ears, and eventually the Queen herself grew curious. Fiona was smart enough to side with the Aes Sidhe Banrigh when the time came to make her choice. She's a bright woman, and she knows where real power lies. Mundane wealth wasn't enough to impress her, and she hitched her wagon to the Queen's bright star. The choice has served her well. First a royal advisor, now the Royal Steward, the black-haired beauty is ever at the Lady Brane's side, and her meteoric rise has left her speaking almost with the Lady Brane's own voice.

The Steward is a position of immense importance, responsibility, and power in the Seelie Court. Gifted with the Bardic voice of truth, they speak no lies, their word is law, and their authority is second only to the Queen. Royal Stewards serve either for a very long time or a remarkably short one. There have, in all the history of the Court, been no lukewarm Stewards, no middling Stewards, no decent Stewards. One is either exceptionally well-suited to working hand-in-hand with the Queen, complementing her style of leadership and handling the Court in a savvy fashion (in which case they may wear the Blue and Gold for timeless ages), or they are ... *not* (and are swiftly replaced, and almost as swiftly forgotten).

The Royal Steward is no mere clerk, though notations are a part of their duty. As they follow the Queen, so are they followed by the Moonlight Book, an artifact of tremendous symbolic importance to the Court, an enormous tome that hovers near them, with a silver quill that records all they see and hear. The First Steward—when he recorded himself into existence, he gave himself no other name—turned the first page and lay the first ink in the Moonlight Book, and the history of the Seelie Court began in earnest. They record the history of the Court, the royal decrees, the punishments, the proclamations. The proud line of Stewards of the Court are historians, not middle managers or simple bureaucrats, and theirs is the voice that can call mad courts of chaotic fey to order. They are storytellers, as well, burdened with all the epic tales of the Court, grand histories and clever schemes, monster hunts and knightly battles.

Blue and gold have long been the colors of the mortal Stewards, and they have picked up that tradition secondhand, inspired by shadows and half-memories of their Seelie inspiration. The blue robes of office that drape the Seelie Court's Steward are so rich and dark as to be almost black, and some who have stared too long claim to have seen the stars within their shadowy folds. They cloak the Royal Steward in good fortune to match their iron will, and not a single Steward, not one in all the histories written into the Moonlight Book, has died while serving the office. As a ranking member of the Court, they are allowed to go armed, and therein comes the gold of their position, as well; the Golden Sword is as keen as the wit of its wielder, and the bearer of the blade is said to be able to cut to the truth of any who stand before them.

The last, perhaps most distinctive, feature of the Steward of the Court is their age. All who hold the title bear the respect and recognition of the Court, bear a tremendous burden, and are shrouded in responsibility. The office of the Steward is as timeless and stable as the throne, and so when they are sworn in, Stewards age; not to the point of infirmity, no, but simply enough to gain a touch more gravitas. A hint of grey at the temples, a few more lines when they squint to judge the truth of something, a deeper frown. There becomes a face made for authority and dignity, and the silver streaks in Fiona Saito's hair stand as testament to this ancient tradition.

Fiona Saito, Royal Steward

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	Ess	Mag
2	4	5	2	6	6(9)	6(8)	7	5.032	5

Condition Monitor (P/S): 10/11
Armor: 9
Limits: Physical 4, Mental 8(11), Social 9
Physical Initiative: 13 + 1D6
Skills: Arcana 7, Artisan 4, Computer skill group 10, Cracking skill group 9, Influence skill group 9, Intimidation 6, Perception 6, Performance 5
Qualities: Analytical Mind, Codeslinger (Matrix Perception), I C U, Mentor Spirit (Knowledge, stats as Snake), Overclocker, Pacifist (10), Profiler
Cyberdeck: The Silver Book, Device Rating 6, default set to Attack 8, Sleaze 8, Data Processing 9, Firewall 9
Augmentations (betaware): Attention co-processor, cerebellum booster 2, cerebral booster 3, three datajacks, data lock (6), image link, math SPU, sound link
Adept Powers: Cool Resolve 2, Improved Ability Computer +3, Improved Ability Negotiation +2, Kinesics 4
Programs: Armor, Biofeedback Filter, Browse, Edit, Encryption, Fork, Guard, Hammer, Lockdown, Toolbox, Track, Wrapper
Gear: The Blue Robes (AR = Logic, 9)

THE ROYAL EXECUTIONER

Donal Viltharion is an idiot, and everyone in the Court with the smallest snuff box's worth of sense knows it. He has gotten by as long as he has among quick-witted courtiers by standing in the shadows of those who find him too pretty to let stumble, and he has made a career—a life—of tittering from one paternalistic patron to another. He is empty-headed and oblivious, but very, very, nice to look at. That has, until recently, been enough.

The realities of courtly living caught up to the insipid Donal when he spoke out of turn about his Queen's latest gown. Or, rather, about what he could clearly see through it. Charming flirtation is one thing, courtly whispers hidden behind colorful fans is another, but bald-faced statements concerning the royal curves? Those are entirely a different beast.

And so it is that Donal came to wear the black hood and bear the Silver Axe. He sulks in the corners of the Court, pouting prettily in shadow, carrying his too-heavy blade, and hoping an even greater fool might happen by and relieve him of his burden.

It has been literally ages since anyone feared the Royal Executioner. The Seelie simply don't have it *in* them to respect someone whose only task is to swing an oversized blade, to end a life with an ugly, brutal, stroke. Executioners are no shining fae cavaliers bearing steel in the name of grace and duty. There is no skill to be found in their ugly work, no pride to be taken in so artless a killing. A butcher at least serves a reasonable purpose, a skillful chef with a knife filleting a fish can at least turn it into a meal, and a hunter at least has to give chase before the kill.

The Royal Executioner, however, is simply the Court's brutal whim given form and title. They are artless, crude, and brutal, and as such frowned upon. Donal is the latest in a long line of Royal Executioners chosen strictly as a means of punishing the holder of the title. Shame carries tremendous weight in the Court—it is, perhaps, the heaviest of burdens—and everyone knows that Executioners are chosen as the Lady Brane's way of exerting dominance over an unruly courtier, of reminding her peers that she rules, of jerking a wayward noble's leash and giving them a graceless, thankless task. Mortals have long handed out unfortunate, grim work as punishment—roadside waste disposal, peeling potatoes in the army, extra chores around the house—and things are simply a little more dramatic in the Court.

The Executioner position was once regarded as a necessary ill rather than a position of shame, but that ended with an attack on the Queen herself, ages ago. The assassins, three brothers, were slowed by the Steward, dazzled by the Queen, and arrested by the Royal Champion. The whole Court knew their jealous father was the one who'd ordered their attack, but when charged with the crime, he denied it, and denied them. Outraged by his cowardice and disloyalty in equal measure, the Lady Brane appointed him Royal Executioner, on the spot, offering him the opportunity to prove the loyalty he claimed. She lined up his sons, youngest to oldest, and bade him do his duty.

The first sweep made him week. The second made him admit his guilt. The third drove him mad.

The Silver Axe has never been so heavy a burden as to that schemer, but it is a burden, still. Many a headstrong noble has worn the hood and borne the Silver since then, and been allowed to retire bloodlessly. The hapless Donal Viltharion hopes to be in such company, hopes

that no one will require the ultimate sanction while the blade is his to carry, hopes that the Lady Brane will take forget his slight and pass the responsibility on to others.

Such was the fate of the previous Executioner, the Lady Serra Tintagel. She schemed against the Lady Brane by hunting mortals without leave, rumors say. No formal charges were brought to bear, and only the position of Royal Executioner, the unofficial punishment, was ever levied against her. That she was allowed to retire so soon—and bloodlessly—has led to yet more whispers among the Court, thinking that the oafish Donal may simply have said the wrong thing at just the right time, opening his stupid mouth and giving the Lady Brane the excuse she needed to let Lady Serra think she'd escaped punishment and suspicion.

The gossip of courtiers about the shame and burden of the Royal Executioner, that hooded killer so often allowed to retire without blooding the Silver Axe, hides a darker, more dangerous, truth. The publicly appointed Executioner is not the only killer at the Queen's disposal. Many of her foes will never be charged with a crime and formally sanctioned; instead, they are left to darker agents.

Whispers abound concerning these shadowy hunters and grim-faced killers at the Lady Brane's employ. For untold seasons they have murdered in her name, allowed to bear no blame, their honor allowed no blemish, so long as they fulfill their oath and follow one rule: some variant of the Executioner's hood must be worn. They bear nothing so obvious as the Silver Axe, and they are allowed to kill as necessity demands, free to murder with silvered steel, spirits, spells, or submachine guns, so long as the job gets done. But they must wear some manner of mask, some manner of hood, some tiny semblance of a uniform. It may be a roguish bandana, a hastily wrapped turban, a simple balaclava, or even a fantastic ninja mask, but some form of black cloth must wrap around their face when they kill in her name.

Even those who believe these secret Executioners exist have no real idea who serves. Three contenders stand out at present, three dark souls that some whisper may kill for the Lady in secret: the steel-eyed and broad-shouldered Sir Cian of Slieve League, left-handed and peerless with a blade; the Tír Tairngire exile, Talondel, a sniper desperate for new patronage and royal guidance; and the Lady Siobhan si'Terien, a golden-haired beauty with a winsome smile that fae and mortal alike find irresistible.

Donal Viltharion, Royal Executioner

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	Edge	Ess
3	4	3	2	3	2	2	7	1	6

Condition Monitor: 10
Armor: 6
Limits: Physical 4, Mental 3, Social 8(11)
Physical Initiative: 5 + 1D6
Skills: Archery 3, Blades 1 (Axe +2), Con 6 (Seduction +2), Etiquette 7 (Sycophantic +2), Negotiation 4, Perception 3
Qualities: First Impression, Unlucky
Augmentations: Tailored Pheromones (3), Assorted Cosmetic Bioware Equivalents
Gear: Fine Courtly Clothing (AR 4), The Black Hood (AR +2)
Weapons: The Silver Axe [Blade, Acc 3, Reach 2, DV 8P, AP -5, counts as a weapon focus versus magical defenses]

THE COURT JESTER

Whirling flashing knives spinning and twirling through the air herald the arrival of Garbh Filíochta, court jester.

The jester is a traditional and ceremonial position in the Court of Shadows. The official role of the jester is to speak truth to power and to provide a talking companion to the Queen when she needs to take her mind off affairs of state. Garbh is also an accomplished juggler, tumbler, singer, rhymer, and dancer, all skills that she uses to excellent effect to distract and amuse those who might conduct intrigue within the court, which is the unofficial role of the jester.

Garbh has made the most of the jester's immunity to punishment for small crimes. No one but the Queen may punish Garbh, and she has made it clear that Garbh will not suffer for stealing the handkerchief of a noble or picking the pocket of a courtier. This has allowed Garbh to prick the egos of the proud and fluster the solemn. It has also allowed her to go largely unpunished when she has been caught committing minor acts of intrigue in the court, like when she was caught selling secrets and spying on diplomats. Being able to intrigue without punishment has let her hone her skills where others trying to do the same would have been long exiled. She has made herself an extremely skilled negotiator and manipulator. Garbh's weapon of choice in the Court is using a careless word or a simple phrase to prod people into action, or using a pointed joke or embarrassing pratfall to slow down those who oppose her. Gentle

manipulations have now left her fairly influential within the Court. As well as direct action, Garbh is known as a buyer and seller of information, a profitable side business that has also led to a web of people who owe her minor favors, but her plans have stalled ... she has favor but no power, influence but no strength. In order to take the next step, she needs a showcase, and opportunity to really show her leadership and skill. The Yellowstone Calamity, and the new visitors to the Court in its wake, may be just the opportunity that she needs.

Garbh is careful to interact with almost everyone who comes to Court, longtime member and fresh visitor alike. She spends much more time with and near any newcomers to the court, making sure to try to work out why they have come, and what benefits they might bring. She does this by entertaining them, sticking close enough to listen to them at a party, or even gently pulling them aside and offering to fill them in on Court etiquette. Most find her manner to be charming and entertaining—she is an excellent juggler, tumbler, and all-around entertainer.

Garbh's interest in the Yellowstone incident, and desire to learn and profit from it, has naturally aligned her goals with those who urge more extraplanar meetings and travel. The Death, Comet, and Eclipse factions tend to align in similar directions to hers, with Higher Power finding both strong similarities and strong differences with her. Courtiers such as Lord Serrin and members of the Dragon and Hermit factions often seem to be in her way. Of course, she is loyal to the queen, providing close ties to Aes Sidhe Banrigh.

Many courtiers discount or ignore the silver-tongued juggler, but the heads of factions and households are well aware of her and what she does. Much of the time when someone says "I've recently learned of a plot" or "My sources say ..." they are directly referring to Garb Filíochta.

She is in demand for almost every nightly banquet. She is a frequent guest at the Queen's Banquet, but also makes appearances at the Regency and Cyprian feasts. She occasionally condescends to appear at mid-level banquets, especially Tricksters' Buffets. Having an appearance by Garbh at a fest aimed toward newcomers is an excellent indicator that a star is rising at court.

On rare occasions, the positions are reversed, and the Queen throws a ball for Garbh. At the Fool's Ascent nobles and courtiers make a show of bowing and serving their servants and followers. Of course the followers are careful not to make too much of the occasion, lest the event go to Garbh's head or the Queen grow overly jealous.

A lithe and agile ork, standing about six feet high, Garbh is athletically built with well-toned muscles and a pleasant smile. Merry, but not goofy, she maintains the dignity of the Court even as she entertains visitors. She usually wears a loose and comfortable silver-and-white motley, and on ceremonial occasions she wears a full jester's motley with bells and wand.

Garbh is often spectacular when she wants to be the center of attention, she has juggled wine glasses full of wine, taken a spectacular tumbling fall only to spring up in front of an ambassador, and on one memorable occasion, she stole ceremonial daggers from several members of the Court in order to perform a blade dance in front of a visiting diplomatic envoy. Unlike previous jesters, Garbh is not needlessly cruel to her targets, most of whom see the humor in the situation, and when it looks like someone lacks a sense of humor entirely, she will give them due space. A visiting delegation of spirits may enjoy a humorous display, or even become the butt of a good-natured joke. A visiting warrior-priest in blood-soaked armor festooned with blades will be avoided. On those occasions when Garbh has misjudged a jape, her relationship with the queen has prevented any relationships from becoming too sour, or worse, blood from being spilled.

The Queen has Garbh's unquestioned loyalty. Garbh will never betray a confidence of the queen (unless she has been asked to spread misinformation), nor will she ever take an action which she judges will hurt the Queen, even at the cost of her own ambition. In exchange, Garbh has a confidante and is able to talk in unguarded language with the Queen of the court.

Garbh Filíochta, court jester

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	Edge	Ess
5	5	5	4	3	3	4	6	6	4

Condition Monitor (P/S): 11(12)/10
Armor: None
Limits: Physical 7, Mental 5, Social 7
Initiative: 9 + 1D6
Active Skills: Athletics skill group 6, Blades 3, Con 5, Disguise 4, Etiquette 7, Leadership 2, Navigation 4, Negotiation 4, Archery 3, Sneaking 4, Unarmed Combat 3, Performance 10 (Juggling +2), Unarmed Combat 3, Perception 5, Gymnastics 5
Knowledge Skills: The Factions 4, Fae Species 4, Jokes and Japery 6, The Power Structure of the Court 4
Qualities: Ambidextrous, Home Ground (The Court, You Know a Guy), First Impression

Augmentations: Bone lacing (aluminum)
Vehicles: Yamaha Growler
Gear: Jesters Motley (and wand), a small apartment near the throne room.
Weapons: Usually does not carry a weapon
Contacts: Much of the Court, including the Queen (7/5)

THE ROYAL CONSORTS

On casual observation, there seem to be members of the Court with no discernible function. Blending into the background behind the more powerful members of the court, they are not servants, but they also do not hold any official title. Despite this, they are respected and far more important than their appearance suggests. These are the *càraidean*, the royal consorts, or courtesans.

There is often a romantic element between the *càraidean* and those they serve, but this is not always so. In many cases, such as the Queen's retinue, the *càraidean* function more as ladies in waiting than romantic companions. This distinction is most clearly drawn in the two classes of Seelie consorts, the *Càraidean ke'Onair* (the courtesans of honor) and the *Càraidean ke'Celliste* (the courtesans of light).

The *Càraidean* ke'Onair are intelligent and full of wit. They are gifted artists and performers, and they especially shine when dealing in court politics, delicate conversations, and general pleasantness. Theirs is the difficult job of using their considerable skills in such a way that their patron on the court gains favor for the actions of their *càraidean*, rather than the *càraidean* themselves. In many ways, they are understood to be, and are treated as, equals among the nobility of the court. And if they play the game well enough, they may be granted titles of their own, or perhaps realize even greater influence without such formality. To say they serve the Seelie Court in a similar way that shadowrunners serve the mundane world would not be altogether inappropriate.

The *Càraidean* ke'Celliste, a lesser class of courtesan, are those who have not proven themselves to the Court, and serve at the pleasure of the more established courtesans, much the same as the *Càraidean* ke'Onair serve their patrons.

In the retinue of Lady Brane Deigh, there are several noteworthy consorts. In this instance, their positions as *Càraideans* ke'Banrigh, the consorts of the Queen, make them very influential indeed.

Fogharail ke'Coille is the youngest of the Queen's *càraidean*, and also one of the most beautiful. Her hair is the color of autumn leaves and her skin fair like snow. While still technically a *Càraidean* ke'Celliste, Fogharail has proven herself to be a formidable ally. There are many among the court who take her youth for granted and are surprised when they are outmaneuvered in front of honored guests. Fogharail prefers errands that concern nature and the spirits, and she is often seen in the company of a wulver called Uainelatha, who is fiercely protective of her.

Given that they are rarely seen at Court, it often comes as a surprise that not all of Lady Brane's consorts are female. Chief among the Queen's male *càraidean* is Marcus Ko. Marcus is a masterfully skilled artisan. He works for the Queen alone and holds the same favor as the rest of her consorts. Marcus is never far from the Queen at any moment, although his small stature and glamours keep him nearly invisible to those only concerned with their own machinations. Marcus' height and feathery blond hair often get him mistaken for a child, although he is believed to be much older than the Queen herself. When Lady Brane wears a new outfit, wants something crafted, or needs something repaired, Marcus is who she turns to. It is rumored that Marcus has become one of the Queen's few trusted confidants.

The Queen's *càraidean* are trained to fade into the atmosphere when Court is held, so as not to detract from the Queen's majesty or position. The exception to this is Cairistiona Cipresso. Cairistiona sings for the Queen and Court at nearly all official functions, providing entertainment and enchantment for all guests. She is kind and sweet, offering to give lessons to other courtesans in exchange for an evening's company. What those lesser *càraidean* do not realize is that Cairistiona is devious and deceptive on the Queen's behalf. She has a mystical way of enchanting nobility and *càraidean* alike. It puts them at ease and places her in the perfect position to draw out secrets and hidden plots, often without anyone knowing they have been revealed. Many court intrigues have been foiled after an evening spent listening to Cairistiona's songs.

Of course the Queen is not the only one on the court with formidable consorts. Plor na mBan, the Woman of Flowers, is a consort who has had many patrons. In fact, no one except the Queen in Exile can say for sure how long she has been influencing the court. Yet she never raises above her station as *Càraidean* ke'Celliste, though she enjoys the respect and reverence due many

who hold positions above her. Many patrons seek her out for her shrewd advice and comely demeanor, and she always seems glad to help. Strangely, she never stays with a single patron long and never returns to the service of a patron she has served already.

Perhaps the most interesting group of consorts are the *Càraidean* ke'Celliste of the Zhigul Makers. The only dwarfs represented in the Seelie Court do not actually appear at the court themselves, but send only dwarven consorts to conduct business and keep up relations with the Court for their masters. Although certain documents suggest they have operated for hundreds of years, they have yet to promote to *Càraidean* ke'Onair, as their patrons never appear in Court to sue for it. The Zhigul consorts do not seem to mind, however, and there are few on the court that fault them for it. Unlike dwarven stereotypes, the Zhigul *càraidean* conduct themselves well within Court etiquette and even seem to be able to deftly speak to many of the arcana factions without angering others.

Standard Càraidean ke'Onair (Professional Rating 4)

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	Ess
2	4	4	2	4	5	5	6	4.1

Condition Monitor: 9
Armor: 0
Limits: Physical 4, Mental 7, Social 8
Physical Initiative: 9 +1D6
Skills: Acting skill group 5, Animal Handling 3, Arcana 5, Artisan 6, Blades 3, Disguise 5, First Aid 4, Forgery 5, Influence skill group 6, Instruction 5, Medicine 4, Outdoors skill group 4, Perception 5, Sneaking 4
Qualities: Adept, Code of Honor: Seelie Court, First Impression, Perceptive (2), Too Pretty to Hit, Inspired (Artisan)
Languages: Sperethiel N, English 6, French 6, Irish Gaelic 6, Japanese 6
Metatype Abilities: Enhanced Senses: Low-Light Vision
Gear: Armband with sigil of patron, clothing (latest Seelie fashion), golden necklace
Adept Powers: Enthralling Performance (Artisan), Heightened Concern (up to -2), Improved Sense (Improved Tactile), Nimble Fingers, Voice Control (1)
Weapons: Sidhe dagger, Short Blade [Blade, Acc 7, DV 4P, AP -1]

Standard Càraidean ke'Celliste (Professional Rating 3)

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	Ess
2	3	3	2	3	3	4	5	4.1

Condition Monitor: 9
Armor: 0
Limits: Physical 3, Mental 5, Social 7
Physical Initiative: 7 +1D6
Skills: Acting skill group 4, Animal Handling 3, Arcana 3, Artisan 5, Blades 2, Disguise 3, First Aid 3, Forgery 3, Influence skill group 5, Instruction 3, Medicine 3, Outdoors skill group 2, Perception 1, Sneaking 1
Qualities: Code of Honor: Seelie Court, First Impression, Perceptive (1), Too Pretty to Hit
Languages: Sperethiel N, English 5, French 4, Irish Gaelic 5, Japanese 4
Metatype Abilities: Enhanced Senses: Low-Light Vision
Gear: Armband with sigil of patron, clothing (latest Seelie fashion), golden necklace,
Weapons: Sidhe dagger, Short Blade [Blade, Acc 7, DV 4P, AP -1]

Fogharail ke'Coille

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	Edge	Ess
3	5	5	2	3	3	4	6	2	6

Condition Monitor (P/S): 10/10
Armor: 4
Limits: Physical 4, Mental 5, Social 7
Physical Initiative: 9 +1D6
Skills: Acting skill group 5, Animal Handling 3, Arcana 5, Artisan 6, Blades 3, Disguise 5, First Aid 4, Forgery 5, Influence skill group 6, Instruction 5, Medicine 4, Outdoors skill group 4, Perception 5, Sneaking 4
Qualities: Adept, Code of Honor: Seelie Court, First Impression, Inspired: Artisan, Linguist, Perceptive (2), Too Pretty to Hit
Languages: Sperethiel N, English 4, French 3, Irish Gaelic 6, Japanese 3
Metatype Abilities: Enhanced Senses: Low-Light Vision
Gear: Clothing (Latest Seelie Fashion), Sidhe undergown, silver armband with Queen's arcana, silver moon tiara
Adept Powers: Animal Empathy (1), Cloak (1), Demara (4 hours), Enhanced Perception (2),

Improved Sense: Improved Tactile, Light Touch (2), Nimble Fingers, Traceless Walk

Weapons: Sidhe dagger, short blade [Blade, Acc 7, DV 4P, AP -1]

Marcus Ko

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	M	Edge	Ess
5	5	4	5	4	5	5	4	6	4	6

Condition Monitor (P/S): 11/10

Armor: 9

Limits: Physical 7, Mental 7, Social 6

Physical Initiative: 9 +1D6

Skills: Arcana 6, Armorer 9 (12), Artisan 9 (13), Banishing 3, Binding 3, Blades 3, Clubs 6, Counterspelling 5, Disguise 4, Enchanting skill group 6, Etiquette 4, First Aid 4, Forgery 5, Instruction 5, Intimidation 3, Locksmith 5, Medicine 4, Negotiation 2, Perception 5, Performance 3, Ritual Spellcasting 5, Sneaking 2, Spellcasting 5, Summoning 4

Qualities: Ambidexterous, Aptitude: Artisan, Blandness, Code of Honor: Seelie Court, Elemental Focus: Fire, Inspired: Artisan, Path of the Wheel Mystic Adept, The Artist's Way: Improved Ability

Languages: Sperethiel N, English 4, French 4, Irish Gaelic 6, Japanese 4

Metatype Abilities: Enhanced Senses: Low-Light Vision

Gear: Sidhe Armored Vest, Clothing (Moderate Seelie Fashion), Blacksmith Tools, Silver Armband with Queen's Arcana.

Spells: Air Filter, Analyze Device, Analyze Magic, Clean [Choose], Detect Magic, Fashion, Flamethrower, Shape Metal

Rituals: Imbue Item, Ward

Adept Powers: Analytics (1), Improved Ability (4): Armorer, Improved Ability (4): Artisan, Improved Sense: Improved Tactile, Rooting (1), Temperature Tolerance (1)

Adept Powers: Animal Empathy (1), Cloak (1), Demara (4 hours), Enhanced Perception (2), Improved Sense: Improved Tactile, Light Touch (2), Nimble Fingers, Traceless Walk

Weapons: Forge hammer [Club, Reach 1, Acc 4, DV 8P, AP —, weapon focus (3)]

CHAMPION OF THE QUEEN

Lord Serrin Sol is the current and long-standing Queen's Champion. He is not the only Champion in memory, but the legends and tales of his predecessors are slipping from the minds and tongues of those few aged enough to possess them. His life, much like that of the Queen he symbolizes, is far longer than memories allow, though his raven-black hair shows no sign of greying. His grizzled face, often hidden beneath his helm as he stands ever vigilant, bears some lines of age and is not without scars from years of facing danger head on, but his true age is told by his eyes. Eyes that seem to stare back through the centuries as they look through you.

As he stands beside the Queen in title, he also supports her view on the material plane and the new issues arising from the Yellowstone Calamity. As the Champion, he has not survived on strength and steel alone. While the list of foes he has vanquished in the name of the Queen is long, it is limited by the traditions of the court—traditions that would be threatened by the arrival of less-civilized elements from the material plane. A wise warrior knows a weary fighter can be struck down by even the untrained farmer, so it is best to limit the fighting.

Because of his views, Lord Serrin stands in direct opposition of Magister Alessius Vyperalyn, Advisor to the Queen. A strange tale told so woefully throughout time of the sword and voice not standing together.

Serrin Sol has walked many Paths in his long life. He now stands atop the ranks of warriors, but he has also spent time with artists, scholars, and servants. He is no brute, and those that think of him as such often find their plans unravelling. While Lord Serrin may be best known for his feats with the sword, earning the place of Champion in the Seelie Court is not a test of metal but of mettle. He has considerable skills beyond combat.

The Seelie Court floor has seen its fair share of blood despite the stated reticence toward violence. In his years, Lord Serrin has demonstrated a code of honor that most consider his greatest weakness. While his blade has spilled lifeblood, he has never struck a foe who has not struck first. Violence by the Champion only comes as a result of violence against him. That may not always be the best of plans, but it is a course he adheres to. The fact that he absorbs so many initial blows puts him in a certain degree of peril—his arcane talents and resilience are all that have kept him from a poisonous end on several occasions. He takes a particular relish in

exacting revenge on those who try to use poison against him, as his idiosyncratic sense of honor is not marred by the occasional act of vengeful torture.

Seeking to rein in their efforts to draw the Seelie Court into the affairs of others, Lord Serrin plays politics with the best of them. The favor of the Queen's Champion is often the favor of the Queen, as her ear is always close. His image as a brute and a warrior often leads others to underestimate his cunning, a side of the man that is rarely exposed while attending official Court events. During those times he listens, gathers information, and maintains his warrior's vigil, ready to protect or stand for the Queen. The keen mind of Lord Serrin is revealed during private conversations within his office chambers or a quiet meeting of chance in just the right place at the right time.

A view of any member of the Court cannot be complete without looking at some of the factions they are rumored to support or oppose. In the case of the Queen's Champion, every faction finds themselves on his list, but Lord Serrin has a far more pragmatic view of individuals than other courtiers do. While most in the Court use faction affiliations to make broad assumptions about people, Lord Serrin looks at each individual, not the faction to which they seem connected, to determine their value to his causes. It has proven quite a valuable method as it also never paints a connection as permanent, since alliances and affiliations shift so frequently.

Currently, Lord Serrin's dealings have involved a large number of courtiers and individuals who claim affiliations to the Bastard and the Hanged Man. Neither are factions one would expect, but in the Seelie Court, there is always more going on beneath the surface. The speculation of the many proposes an effort to oppose Alessius, while the speculation of the minority sees these efforts undermining the work of Coatepetl and other non-native court denizens.

Seeing a lot of courtiers or petitioners may reveal connections between Lord Serrin and most factions, but connections to Hermit are the most hidden. To see Lord Serrin's efforts there, one must look outside the Court and endeavor to follow the path to nowhere while seeking nothing. Those poetic words obscure the truth (that's the way of the Court), but it is the way to discover how often Lord Serrin meets with members of this reclusive faction. Meetings are short, sometimes just done in passing or while waiting at the edge of a crowd or for an obstacle to pass, but they happen. Seeking to keep the doors to the Court closed to outsiders, Lord Serrin works with those who want nothing more than to be left alone by all.

Dealings with the Aes Sidhe Banrigh are left to the Queen. Her Champion has, on occasion, been sent as a messenger, but that is usually for the purposes of intimidation and not the idea of Lord Serrin. He prefers to control the location for meetings and not get sent into a potential pit of vipers. His position also leaves him in a strange place as a member of the Queen's inner circle but not a true member of her supporting faction. They have similar views, so for most that is enough to let the separation stay.

Lord Serrin keeps connections to the Magician distant at best. He often calls upon their aid for investigations and criminal proceedings and thus tries to avoid ties that would create a semblance of favoritism.

Due to the ties of Dragon and Higher Power to Magister Alessius, Lord Serrin has not made many friends within those factions, despite his arcane elven heritage and position of power. Both factions keep their distance and are probably wise to do so. Higher Power's view of the material plane's riches as a source to plunder has been a thorn in Serrin's side for decades. As for the Dragon, Lord Serrin's youth was spent traveling with all races and he places an elven birthright no greater than any others.

Every hero must have a nemesis, and Lord Serrin has his somewhere within the factions of Death, Comet, and/or Eclipse. All three seek stronger connections to other worlds, which he opposes, and all of them have forces within that are willing to revolt to bring change. A revolution that would need to be put down by Lord Serrin. His efforts are constant and ongoing, and usually out in the open during Court. At least the efforts he wants them to see.

No one in power can avoid some attempted connection to the Unseelie Court, and Lord Serrin is no different. The fact that he openly allows any who must face him for justice to attempt prove his alliance to the Unseelie Court, and none have saved themselves by doing so, tends to quell the rumor mill.

Though there are inherent contradictions in the plan, the rumors of Lord Serrin seeking to pull in forces from the material plane to oppose forces from the material plane has been whispered in many ears. Whether it is an attempt by forces to mar his reputation or a true move to use whatever assets are available in order to protect the Court is not known, but the whispers get louder the more people from the material plane come to Court.

The final rumor of Lord Serrin is one few utter for fear of making the words truth. His age and wandering path, as well as the strength of his convictions, has led many to tie the Queen's Champion to the supposed hidden faction of the Vigilante. Those that hold it as truth wait in fear, or anticipation, as they expect his goal was to rise to power before enacting "The Vigilance," their term for the bloody return of the faction.

Lord Serrin Sol, Queen's Champion

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	M	Edge	Ess
6(9)	8(12)	6(9)	6	5	4	6	5	10	6	6

Condition Monitor (P/S): 15/13
Armor: 18
Limits: Physical 8(10), Mental 7, Social 7
Physical Initiative: 15 + 4D6
Skills: Animal Handling 6, Archery 11, Artisan 6, Athletics skill group 8, Blades 13 [20](Sword +2), Clubs 8, Con 10 (Long game +2), Etiquette 7 (Unseelie Court +2), First Aid 6, Intimidation 9, Negotiation 2, Outdoors skill group 6, Perception 7, Leadership 6, Sneaking 9, Throwing Weapons 9, Unarmed Combat 12
Qualities: Adrenaline Surge, Agile Defender, Aptitude (Blades), Common Sense, Exceptional Attribute (Agility), High Pain Tolerance (3), Natural Athlete, Rank (Seelie Court) 3, Rank (Unseelie Court) 3, The Invisible Way, Tough as Nails (Physical) 2, Tough as Nails (Stun) 2, Will to Live 3
Initiate Grade: 18
Adept Powers: Authoritative Tone 2, Critical Strike (Blades), Elemental Weapon (Electricity), Improved Ability (Blades) 7, Improved Agility 4, Improved Body 3, Improved Initiative 3, Mystic Armor 4, Nerve Strike, Riposte 6, Spell Resistance 4
Metamagics: Centering, Extended Masking, Flexible Signature, Masking, Power Point (14)
Gear: Champion's Armor (10), Champion's Helm (AR +1), Champion's Shield (AR +2), Champion's Vestments (AR +1)
Weapons: The Heart of Sol [Blade, Acc 7, Reach 1, DV 10P, AP -3, Force 10 weapon focus]

THE QUEEN IN EXILE

by Walks-through-Tall-Grass

While most would start with an introduction of themselves, I find that the only thing you need to know about me is that if you meet me, Lady Thisbe has deemed you worthy of an audience.

There are few whispers in the Seelie Court as dangerous as claiming to believe the tales surrounding Lady Thisbe Sorrel. Even such dangerous talk is often laughed off by the deepest of believers in order to preserve their reputation. She has many allies and many enemies, though the line between each is often blurred and frequently shifts, as is the standard for the Court.

As for being the Queen in Exile, a millennium in control was enough. While times were not as perpetually interesting back in her day, the Lady dealt with plenty of events that could have ended the Court. Rather than end her reign and step away from the Court, Lady Thisbe decided her best course of action would be to stay close and guide those that came after her with advice and wisdom gained from her centuries of service. The exact circumstances of her departure are lost to the ages, though a few still active in the Court may have memories long enough to know and wisdom enough to keep it to themselves. I personally know nothing of the end of her reign except the whispers I have heard and the pieces I have gathered from her own cryptic statements.

Ageless Youth

The youthful look of Lady Thisbe is not a natural phenomenon. She maintains her appearance and the semblance of sanity she has through ritual blood magic. She claims (not openly, but only to select confidantes) that she must bathe in the blood of "innocent youth," though the definitions of both parts of that term are up for debate. While the ritual maintains her body, her mind is many years past its prime. Disappearances and kidnappings are frequently attributed to the Lady's needs, increasing the fear and distrust of her.

I feel it is best to mention two important points earlier rather than later in this discourse. Knowing each will help to save you from a very uncomfortable audience. For those who have yet to make the acquaintance of Lady Thisbe, the first detail all notice and many scoff at is her appearance. The Lady Thisbe could easily pass for a raven-haired girl in her early teens, though not the early teens of the material world where chemicals corrupt nature, but the early teens of her era of purest nature. Child-like is the way many describe her look, though never to her face and rarely without consequence. It is best to simply accept her appearance as you would any within the Court.

The next notable detail is her manner of speech. The Lady Thisbe speaks over a thousand tongues, many dead for centuries, a few for millennia, and all of those words blend together in a mind full of knowledge that often cannot be expressed in a modern tongue. But to question the meaning of a word is to question the Lady herself, and she does not tolerate being questioned.

To further confuse and baffle those who may have earned her distemper, her responses are varied in the extreme. While some targets of her wrath are immediately cast from her presence, others are kept for extended meetings where she speaks for hours (on a few occasions, days) in cryptic soliloquy. It is common within this time for answers to questions not asked to wander forth in her utterances.

To speak on her politics would require me to speak of every faction. Her web of connections spans the Court and constantly forms and snaps threads with each passing hour. This endeavor would be a waste when only a small space is allotted to discussing the wonder that is the Lady, but suffice it to say that some of her current paths are not likely to change. Namely, her enmity towards Magister Allessius Vyperalyn and her amusement with Death.

Magister Vyperalyn is new to the Court, relatively speaking. He only joined its ranks within the past few decades and has in such a short time moved from courtier of the Higher Power to a trusted voice in the Queen's ear. Rumors speak of a haughty laugh at first seeing the Lady Thisbe. Some claim he thought it was a joke, a Court hazing, that this child was the millennia-old Queen in Exile. Those close to Lady Thisbe know better. Even the newest courtier knows better than to think the

Queen in Exile a childish prankster. Vyperalyn's brash attitude is thought by some to be an asset, but he must be aware that very few rise to his station while having crossed Lady Thisbe. Though virtually all of the actions of Lady Thisbe are as veiled in secrecy as her past, her endeavors to cross, thwart, and annoy Magister Vyperalyn are often as blunt as a hammer. She will not rest until he has paid for his disrespect.

As for Death, the Lady Thisbe has been courting their shifting forces for centuries. Many rumors say that the Lady Thisbe connects the Seelie and the Unseelie as ranking figure in the former and current Queen of the latter. The rumored ties between the Death faction and Unseelie court are further supported by the Lady's support and her own cornucopia of rumors.

Despite her dislike in her Queen's choice of advisors, Lady Thisbe expresses no ill will for the Lady Brane Deigh. Whispers mention this neutrality is simply veiled animosity, but emissaries from each have met, and Lady Thisbe has never refused an audience to, or been refused by, the Queen or her entourage.

A final point I'd like to make on our Lady Thisbe is her pool of emissaries and a rumor I would like to address concerning their parentage. It has long been rumored that all of the Lady Thisbe's emissaries are her bastard children, fathered by the parade of men she is rumored to take to her bed. These rumors are fueled by the combination of Lady Thisbe's alleged voracious physical appetite and history of violence against any who harm her emissaries. While violence is frowned upon in the Court, one of the most often expounded tales is that of Vestil Mansuede. Vestil was a croki attending Court to seek aid due to recent Invae infestations within his home plane. He sought access to one of the Court's myriad of artifacts. In his first visit he made the mistake of brushing an ungloved hand on Edselia, emissary of Lady Thisbe. His next visit included tossing his note into the air to see it rise, followed by the crowds parting as Lady Thisbe strolled into the center of the hall. She walked directly to Vestil, and with a blurred flash of her hand severed his head. While some say it was simply a slit throat, none claim it was done by any other than the Lady herself. The rumors may or may not be true—I have not met all of her emissaries—but it demonstrates that her emissaries and vassals are as precious to her as her children.

Lady Thisbe Sorrel, Queen in Exile

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	M	Edge	Ess
2	7	5	2	6	5	7	8	12	5	6

Condition Monitor: 9/11
Armor: 2 (Blades 6) (Projectiles 6)
Limits: Physical 3, Mental 8, Social 10
Physical Initiative: 13 + 2D6
Skills: Alchemy 4, Animal Handling 5, Arcana 8, Artificing 4, Assensing 6, Blades 7 (Dagger +2), Con 8 (Seduction +2), Conjuring skill group 6, Counterspelling 8, Disguise 4, Etiquette 9 (Seelie Court +2), Gymnastics 5, Medicine 4, Negotiation 10, Perception 6, Ritual Spellcasting 13, Sneaking 6, Spellcasting 7, Throwing Weapons 5 (Dagger +2)
Qualities: Analytical Mind, Aptitude (Ritual Spellcasting), Exceptional Attribute (Intuition), Lightning Reflexes, Paranoia
Initiate Grade: 12
Spells/Rituals: All base Elemental Combat spells, all Detection spells, all Health spells, Armor, Astral Armor, Alter Memory, Circle of Healing, Curse, Homunculus, Mob Mood, Prodigal Spell, Remote Sensing, Shadow, Ward
Metamagics: Absorption, Anchoring, Astral Bluff, Efficient Ritual, Extended Masking, Greater Ritual, Masking, Quickening, Reflection, Sacrifice, Shielding
Gear: Extravagant Courtly Clothing (AR 2), The Wilting Rose (Anchored Armor/Detect Blade spell; AR +4), The Crystal Crown (Anchored Armor/Detect Projectile spell; AR +4)
Weapons: The Dagger of Winter [Blade, Acc 7, Reach —, DV 4P, AP -1, Force 10 Athame]

Arts of the Craft

by CZ Wright

"The job is quite simple. Marlow Manor will be undergoing a cleansing ceremony tonight. Your job is to travel throughout the manor and make sure all the windows and doors are secured, and that all the residents and staff have left. The pollen we use for the cleansing proves quite an irritant to astral beings, but can also harm physical beings—nosebleeds, migraine headaches, eye bleeding—nothing too serious, but if we don't have to deal with the complaints, I'd rather not."

The steward set the temples of his tiny wire-frame spectacles against the shaven sides of his undercut. He wrapped the ends around his protruding ears and pushed the bridge down above the bulbous end of his long, thin nose. He peered at me. "I trust you'll have no problems with this task?"

"No problems." I hoped I managed to keep any sign of irritation out of my voice.

"Good." The steward turned his craggy face toward the scrolls on the desk before him. "We will pay you upon completion. Report back to this office tomorrow morning, and you'll receive your pay."

Damn this place. Was I dismissed? And if so, was I supposed to bow, address him, curtsey, or what? I hesitated, glancing over the office, the steward, and his desk. For a steward of the Magician faction, however minor I had heard his influence might be, he kept a decidedly unkempt desk. But, knowing the Seelie Court as I did, the state of his desk could mean anything. It could be a veiled protestation of some working condition, a message to any who approached that he was so important he couldn't be bothered to clean up, or maybe just an indication that he was a pig.

After a year stuck among the fae, I would have expected to have gained some talent for understanding

why they do what they do. All I have learned, though, is to ignore the words exiting their mouths and read their body language instead. This tactic has failed me far less often than relying on the words they speak. And paddling frantically in their social undercurrents is an improvement over drowning.

The steward's head rose. He scowled at me. "Don't you have somewhere to be?"

"Ah, yes. Yes, I do. By your leave." I bowed and waved my arm across my body as I'd seen other courtiers do in the past, turned, and left the office.

"You're losing your edge." Jergens tsked and shook his mane.

"I am not losing my edge. This is a step up from the drek they had me doing before. So what if it's menial work? At least I'm that much closer to getting the hell out of here."

Jergens shot me a baleful stare. Any weight his gaze carried dissipated like the steam from his teapot (which was shaped like a large allium blossom) as he poured hot water into two tiny leaf-shaped cups.

"I'm sorry." I slid one of the cups toward me. "You know I don't mean it like that. You're the best fixer I ever had. Promise."

He kept his amber eyes locked onto me as he sipped his tea. I meant what I said. He was the best fixer I ever had—for about thirteen months. Then a stray transfiguration curse struck him, and his contacts darted away like a spooked school of lightning fish, each afraid to know who threw the curse, and each assuming it was someone dangerous to them. I had to take him in to keep us both alive, because business all but dried up ever since.

"That may be. But it doesn't change the fact that you are losing your edge."

I opened my mouth to protest, but he continued.

"Yes, I realize your jobs have improved. What I mean is while the locals have kept you busy as a specimen of study, you haven't had the need or the opportunity to keep your skills sharp. Word travels, and the only jobs I can get for you now aren't much better than glorified guard or servant."

"I haven't lost my edge!"

"Prove it."

I glanced around my apartment—it was too small for me, let alone me and my guest, who was twice as tall as me. The welts on his head illustrated his learning curve trying to remember to duck through every doorway. "I don't think a physical demonstration is possible."

Jergens closed his eyes and started to nod in the smug way he had.

"But I can tell you that there isn't much to practice. Just don't let them see you. That's all you need to know."

Jergens snorted.

"All right, yes. There's more to it than that, but it is that simple. With the right skills, you can hide in plain sight, and everyone will overlook you. Once you make eye contact, though, it's game over because you're found out. I see you." I leaned back against the wall and propped my feet up on the stool beside me. "Now, you see, I have a tremendous advantage."

"Do you?" Jergens sounded less than impressed.

"Yes. Since I'm a dwarf and everyone, it seems, in the Seelie Court is so damned tall, they usually literally overlook me."

Through half-closed eyes, Jergens stared blankly at me. "I take it back," he said finally. "For such a miserable attempt at humor, I, too, am ready for you to get the hell out of here."

Rays of sunset glittered off the copper in Marlow Manor's smooth, sunstone walls as we started along the long, winding road toward the house. The manor was a gem in a small, emerald-green clearing of the city. Once the home of a high-ranking member of the Magician faction, the manor was now little more than a trophy, maintained only for the purposes of housing esteemed visitors or holding lavish ceremonies. Four months ago, they hired me as a curiosity for training they held out here. A slew of junior courtiers took turns attempting to negotiate with me, their token mortal. The onslaught set me on edge; I ended up taking a swing at one of them, and they quickly realized my talents were better employed toward other ends.

The cart driver grunted after I asked him to wait. He muttered something that sounded like "Eye of bee hair"

and drove off. I could only hope it was assent, and I entered the manor as cloud cover drifted over the last light of day.

Clearing the residents and staff from the manor proved easier than I had anticipated. The few who remained were stubborn or flighty, but when I mentioned the pollen cart was on its way, they cooperated.

I let them go on ahead of me while I latched all the windows and outer doors. It occurred to me that perhaps Jergens was right. This was the exact opposite of the jobs I was accustomed to back home. Perhaps that's why Magician was so quick to assign this kind of job to me. They knew full well how much I wanted to return home, and they knew that it was jobs like those back home that had stuck me here, paying off my sentence in work for those I'd robbed.

I made my way back toward the main entrance as the clouds parted, allowing moonlight to spill across the floors of the manor. My thoughts drifted among memories of the exciting second-story work from back home. When footsteps from somewhere behind me startled me out of my reverie, I relied on old instincts and hid against the wall near the curtains. My arm rubbed against the wall as I pressed myself back into it, and I glanced down to see it was coated in some sort of bluish dust. Did they start the cleansing before I was clear of the house?

A figure walked down the corridor. He passed my hiding spot, and although he wore a cloak and leathers instead of his standard courtly garb, I recognized the steward's undercut and his protruding ears. I was just about to speak up when he stopped just past the last patch of moonlight before the staircase. He said nothing, and I could not see him well enough to see what he was doing. But he was doing something.

As he half-turned back toward the room, orange runes glowed into existence on every surface the moonlight touched. The steward nodded, apparently satisfied, and strode from the room. Flames began to rise from the runes as they faded. Orange fire soon covered all moonlit surfaces of the room, cloth and stone alike, and it was beginning to spread. Because my hiding spot stood between windows, fire covered the floor between me and both of the exits from the room.

I backed away from the fire and bumped into the window behind me. Seeing no traditional exit from the room, I batted the flaming curtain away, unlatched the window, and pulled myself out onto the ledge beyond. From my vantage point at the outside wall of the manor, I could see orange firelight glowing from nearly every closed window. Was the entire building on fire? A nearby window burst open in a shattering of glass, and tongues of flame licked the night air.

I had no time to waste. Either I would burn to death waiting to see what was going on, or the authorities would arrive and assume I started the blaze. I pulled off my gloves, crouched as best I could, crossed my arms, and set my bare palms on the ledge. Then I slowly stepped until I faced the building, where I walked my feet down the wall. The tips of my fingers held fast through sheer upper-body strength as I lowered myself down. Once at the limit of what I could reach, I set my feet against the wall and pushed upward, letting go of the ledge for the few centimeters I travelled and setting my palms and soles flat against the wall on my way down. Although my magical ability to cling to surfaces aided me in my work, I considered it a point of pride to do what I could without magical aid.

Shouts rang out from a short distance away. I spared a glance toward the road, and saw what must have been the pollen cart stopped halfway down the road, the white-clad workers in various poses of upset dotting the grass to either side of the cart. A bell started to clang from somewhere deeper inside the city. I hastened my descent.

The moment my feet touched the ground, I ran away from the road and toward the surrounding forest, panic propelling me forward. Had the faction finally run out of patience for the strange foreigner they'd taken in? Once they discovered I was still alive, would they try again? How could I possibly explain what I'd witnessed? What game was the steward playing? A blunt accusation would never fly at Court, especially for tongue-tied foreigner. I just had to get back home to my apartment, warn Jergens, and figure out my next move.

Bell clanging gave way to a full-throated siren. I stopped to catch my breath and risked a glance back toward the manor. Even from within the trees, I could see the fire reaching toward the sky, engulfing the house in bright orange flames.

I exited the dense forest and picked through the city toward my apartment, being careful to avoid contact with anyone. Several galloping figures nearly overran me as I darted across the road. Their mounts' unnatural speed marked the riders as local authorities, no doubt rushing to the scene of the crime. I raced to my front door and dove inside.

Jergens sat at the table, his eyes enormous. "What's going on?" His tone made it clear he had some idea that whatever was happening was not good.

"I think they're trying to frame me." I darted around the room, drawing curtains and latching windows.

"Why would they do that?" Jergens screwed up his long face in puzzlement. "They love studying you. And you've done nothing wrong—" He stopped short. "You haven't done anything wrong, have you?"

"No!" I turned the bolt on the front door and hurried over to join Jergens at the table. "I saw the steward—the one who hired me. He did ... something, and the fire started. I know he's responsible, but I have no way of knowing whether he acted with the others' blessing."

"Well, you have to explain. There's no other way to absolve yourself."

"But what if he's not working alone—"

A pounding on the door caused us both to jump. Jergens waved me toward the other room and approached the door. I hid and strained to listen. I heard Jergens open the door.

"Can I help you?"

A deep voice murmured in reply, but I could not make out what it said.

"No, I'm afraid I haven't seen her yet tonight." He sounded tired and bored, for which I was intensely grateful. For as inept as I was with most people, Jergens was a master. His talents could be of great benefit when it came to business, which only sometimes involved lying to officials.

The other voice murmured some more, and Jergens said, "I will. Thank you," and shut the door.

A moment later, he handed me an envelope. "You've received a summons."

I tore the envelope open. In an overly fancy script, the letter requested my presence before an inquiry board of the Magician faction. It reminded me that I had the right to choose the location of the inquiry, but if I did not meet with them before the following sunset, they would put out a call for my arrest.

"I'm finished." I shook my head, aghast.

"No. Consider this, my dear—they've requested you come to an inquiry at a location you may choose. Does that sound like the actions of someone who's out to kill you?"

"To be honest, I don't even know anymore."

Early the next morning, I sent a message to the steward's office. The message requested the honor of the inquiry board's presence at the Southern Glade. I had spent hours agonizing over the decision of where to meet, and finally decided the Southern Glade was the right place. The Glade had a reputation for being haunted by a free spirit that abhorred violence—violence from others, at least. Anyone committing violent acts in the Glade soon learned that the spirit had no qualms about committing violent acts upon the offender. The spirit made the Glade a less-than-desirable location for the average individual—even a gesture as innocent as a light slap could invoke the spirit's ire—but it also made the Glade ideal neutral ground. I felt relief at having come to a decision, but the process left me addled from lack of sleep.

I stood at the Glade as the board arrived. Or, rather, as a retinue of servants carrying furniture arrived. Once the servants placed the table and chairs, the board arrived. My breath caught in my throat at the sight of the steward among the board members. From most senior to least senior, the board members seated themselves. I was dismayed to see the steward was the fourth of seven to sit; I had hoped he wielded less influence.

Without pleasantries, the three most senior members started questioning me.

"At what time did you arrive at the manor?"

"How many individuals did you encounter in the manor prior to the fire?"

I answered their questions one by one, but with each of my answers, my unease grew. I started second-guessing myself, as well as their motives. Was this a sham hearing? How could I know they're not all in on it?

"How long did it take you to complete your duties?"

"Who did you eject from the manor prior to the fire?"

Who did I eject from the manor? I could not remember. Lack of sleep, stress, and fear of my own inadequacy when it came to social encounters began to overwhelm my brain. It took longer and longer for me to answer their questions.

"Describe your activities from the time you arrived at the manor."

I hesitated. Panic lurked at the edges of my thoughts. I glanced over their faces, despair setting in.

"Did you see the person who started the fire?"

Without thinking, I glanced at the steward. His smug expression flickered on his face, and he glanced at one of the older-looking board members upon hearing the question, and then his eyes twitched to mine with a touch too much anticipation.

It was in that involuntary body language that I saw my answer. Our eyes met.

Game over. You're found out. I see you.

I answered the board's questions as honestly as I could.

I did not name the steward.

They decided to question me a second time in a week's time, and they said they would be moving my quarters to a "more secure location." The location turned out to be closer to the factions' guards, and I was nothing if not grateful. Not only did I keep my free rein within the offices, I was still in the faction's employ.

I did not see the steward until a week after my second hearing—in which they acquitted me of wrongdoing.

After office hours, I followed the steward through the city, until we arrived at a small park in the northwest corner of the city. In the dim light, I crept up to the steward.

"I know what you did."

The steward whirled to face me, a dagger in hand and eyes wide. I stood my ground and smiled.

As the steward fumbled for words, I spotted a cloaked figure approach us from behind him.

"It would seem you have found yourself a good candidate for our ranks, Edgar."

The steward—Edgar—cocked his head to the side, studying me. He smiled then and met my eyes. "It would seem I have. Please, listen," he said to me. "We have a job offer for you."

Factions of the Court

by Frosty

In the Sixth World, in the Era of the Bloodflower, the Seelie Court represents the past, the present, and the future of the fae. Hidden beneath layers of manners, protocols, and grand ceremonies, courtiers once devoted to the idyllic Seelie Court, its mysterious yet omnipresent counterpart, the Unseelie, and the unpredictable Wild Fae are now scattered like seeds to the wind. Their beliefs have not only been utterly changed, they've also been challenged by the return of mana to their metaplane and the many threats that may, at any moment, unleash the hounds of war just as they did so many centuries ago.

The losses incurred during the War of Sorrows are still felt among the many members of the Seelie Court, and many courtiers are frightened that they would not survive a second, full-scale battle. They also worry that the Tuatha de Danaan are ill-equipped to deal with the many powerful organizations and foes of the Sixth World. The issue, of course, is plain to all those who possess distant memories of the Fourth World. The crux of the problem is simply this: The Tuatha de Danaan hold less power over humans and metahumans on the earthly plane than the ruling families did in prior ages.

The modern fae might outsmart the average Sixth World citizen in a test of wits, but many courtiers are uncertain whether the Court could amass enough weaponry and physical power to survive a full-scale assault. In the material world, humans are wageslaves, tethered to all-powerful megacorporations who specialize in manufacturing, technology, weapons—even data. Metahumans, while treated poorly by some, eke out a living any way they can. When given the opportunity, a metahuman might rise to the position of CEO. When they're not, however, they roam the streets in gangs, preying on passersby, or forming small groups of shadowrunners to target high-profile marks and rip them of their most precious commodities.

Despite this, Seelie Court members have an advantage, for their spies are everywhere on the earthly plane, and they have collated volumes of eerily accurate information about potential enemies. Bigots assume that the Tuatha de Danaan either know or have contact with all metahumans on the earthly plane, and their biases—while empty and false—are dangerous to elves in particular. Courtiers are less wise about how destructive the average idiot can be, as they aren't familiar with the racist on the street. They are marginally aware of hate groups, such as the Humanis Policlub, and are keeping an eye on them—for now. For runners, this means that jobs focused on data acquisition or security can produce a steady source of income—if they're hoping to work on the metaplane.

Organization

The nascent birth of the factions and the obsession with magical artifacts have led to many courtiers operating in near-total secrecy out of fear for their immediate concerns. Most members of the Seelie Court feel they cannot talk openly as they have in the past, and they are becoming increasingly paranoid because they are not sure who to trust. The Court's reconnection to the earthly plane, and possibly other meta- or astral planes as well, holds the keys to the future of the faerie realm—and courtiers disagree on what shape progress should take. Sometimes, they even harbor unfavorable views toward Lady Brane Deigh herself, and they are paranoid of what the consequences might be if the truth of their opinions were made public. It should also be noted that outward symbols of identification, which some factions do wear and have worn, can put the Tuatha de Danaan in an uncomfortable position. Of course, the ruling families have shared tokens of affection for individual courtiers in the past, but no one faction—especially the members of the Eclipse—wants to be admired as the Lady's

Store whatsit on which Network?

You are not gonna believe this. Okay, I figured out what the disconnect is, and why you can't ho[illegible] the Seelie Court's network. 'Member what I posted about how baffled the fae were last time I mentio[illegible] Matrix? Yeah, they were fascinated by it all right—but not for the reasons you're thinking. Turns out I was half-right about 'em: The fae ain't tech savvy at all, because they don't need to be. You got me? All dem [illegible] supposed to keep safe] all be stored up in those pretty little brains of theirs. They figured out how to use people to store and transmit information, and when they want to remember somethi[illegible] important they just call back their memories from them. Unbelievable, ain't it? They got a simple name [illegible] They call them "Keepers." They got some other elfy name for it, but I forget what it is. Part [illegible] while these Keepers are kind of like robots, they can defend themselves when they need to [illegible] going to hack into them, when they swing a club and bash in your brain. They really don't w[illegible] know what their network is all about.

personal "faction of the month." The faction's views and, to a lesser extent, their members, do not exist to satisfy the whims of the Seelie Court, and to be treated in such a manner could lead to a coup or worse.

Currently, the existence of the factions teeters precariously on the edge of a fine blade. Some, like the Hanged Man, are so unorganized that a shift in day-to-day scheduling could make it almost impossible to meet or scheme. Others are amassing power behind the scenes from shadowy sources, and the numbers of their members are unknown—even to their leaders. Thus, while it can be challenging to find a patron willing to sponsor a guest's visit to the Court, it will be more difficult to identify which faction any one courtier has aligned themselves with. A shadowrunner's best bet would be to learn as much as possible about any given faction, and then find out who its current representative is. Typically, the courtiers who publicly pledge their support for a faction are high-ranking and can handle themselves in Court. Some runners might identify these members as the movers and shakers. Every other faerie, from the up-and-comers to the foreign emissaries, will keep their opinions to themselves. In fact, it is not uncommon for undeclared members of the Court to assess or attend meetings for multiple factions until they settle on one in particular.

Transgressions & Consequences

Like the remainder of the Court, most factions frown upon violence and will temporarily ally with Lady Brane Deigh, even if they have publicly declared her unfit for office, should any murderous act be committed. Factions are strongly based in political leanings and, as such, it may take many months—if not years—for their goals to be achieved. Their members tend to be long-term thinkers who frown upon rash or crude behavior and, if tested, they will remain loyal to the faerie. All courtiers believe that the factions are necessary in order to deal with the complexities of their existence, and they tend to frown on outside interference.

At present, there is no formal system in place to hear crimes against the factions. In many ways, the factions are not as well-formed as some unwitting courtiers propose, because in addition to members and leaders, they also need some amount of organization. Many factions may not have a traditional structure or a system in place to facilitate the sale of state secrets, for example, but they will protect their interests.

In fact, shadowrunners in particular might want to pay attention to the following as examples of how serious the factions treat those who cross them:

- Recently, the naked body of an elf was found stripped in a glade. The elf, who was later identified as Michael Leahy, had the symbol of a labyrinth carved into his chest. He was holding an extremely valuable artifact called the Bracelet of Whispers.

Woven from the needles of a pine tree, the Bracelet of Whispers is a living artifact that has the ability to lower any speaker's voice to a barely audible volume. The murder was clearly designed to send a message—but to whom and why?

- It is rumored that Percy, who was one of the original and founding members of the Bastard faction, was once the official Court Jester and favorite of Lady Brane Deigh and her handmaiden, Sera. Since his sudden departure from the Court ten years ago, the position has been filled, but memorials of a sort to Percy were left behind. His seat of honor at the banquet table is filled with a gruesome sight: a jester's pointed cap placed askew on top of a bleached skull, attached to a limp mannequin adorned in rich fabrics dyed with the colors of the Court.
- Many memorable events, including trials, are recorded in the Book of Memories. This Book, however, is not an archive in the traditional sense. It is a string of courtiers who have been taught the whole, storied history of the Seelie Court and its factions from the beginning. Each courtier can, upon command, recall approximately one thousand years' worth of information, and are expected to do so unfiltered and factually, without a sense of personal bias or political machinations. One "book" in the collection was declared a traitor to the Court and was accused of seeking membership among the Dragon faction. After the knowledge was forcibly removed from the book's mind, the courtier was punished using an archaic ritual known as the Rite of Scarring; the image of a dragon was carved deep into the accused's face.
- Sometimes, running afoul of a faction might happen after initiation. For example, the Magician faction's members follow a specific path to become a Wizard of the 75th Rank or Master Magician, and initiates are expected to form close relationships with higher-ranking wizards. Though trickery is to be expected, there are some rules that cannot be broken—and one of them is to always be honest with one's master. Not too long ago, a young initiate attempted to advance too quickly by taking on three masters at once. By doing so, the initiate was forced to juggle lies between the three, and eventually he was found out. This resulted in the initiate being stripped of the ability to use magic for the duration of one planar year.

Other forms of grievances take place when two factions have conflicting goals, when the will of the factions attempts to usurp the will of the Court, and when an outsider is caught trying to infiltrate a faction or masquerade as a courtier. When a faction cannot take justice into its own hands, then it brings its grievance before Lady Brane Deigh, just as any courtier might. These are the cases that can keep Morning Hearings interesting.

Recruitment & Initiation

Informally, any faerie can say they belong to a faction at any time, and many do to accomplish their personal goals. The factions know this, and some focus on recruiting new members by appealing to their vanity or their greed. Some courtiers might want a better position in the Court, while others may desire a leave of absence to visit the earthly plane, raise a family, or take care of a more serious matter. The more desperate the faction, the more members they might openly acquire, and the larger their ranks will swell.

Presently, visible members of a faction avoid recruiting undesirable subjects, such as prisoners, the invisible "help," and any guests, because they wish to avoid undue scrutiny by the ruling families. Though ten factions have been identified, many more are thought to exist, and with the belief that the Unseelie Court is more active now than ever, faction representatives are careful not to overplay their hand. It should be noted that information pertaining to the membership of any one faction is worth a lot to the Tuatha de Danaan—even though they, too, might belong to a faction. Additionally, it is suspected that a handful of representatives outwardly display signs of allegiance to one faction while belonging to another. This type of bait-and-switch is exceedingly common among the fae, and messages wrapped up in rhymes, anagrams, and other forms of word-related puzzles and poems are exceedingly common.

Similar to the Rites of Reclamation, in which a specific faerie abandons their position in the Court to pledge their life-long support for a royal family member, most factions have both a formal and informal process to become a member. Informally, all members are considered to be temporary allies of a faction until they perform the Rite of Wishes for their given faction, either in public for all to see or in private. Most factions—especially Hanged Man and Death—do not conduct

public ceremonies, because they wish their member to remain secret. Only a precious few, notably the Aes Sidhe Banrigh, sponsor elaborate affairs to welcome their newest members.

During initiation, a faction will sponsor an event inviting all members of the Seelie Court. Anyone who attends the affair, whether it be a grand masquerade ball, a theatrical play, or a well-timed eulogy for the fallen, is considered a potential member and has the right to perform the Rite of Wishes provided that guest can be properly identified and vouched for. Usually, identification occurs in one of two ways; either via a family member or by a sponsor within the faction. After the Court is satisfied that the candidate's identity has been verified, that faerie may request to perform the Rite of Wishes. The methodology of the ritual varies, depending upon each faction, but its intent is the same for all. This Rite is a public declaration of what the initiate hopes to achieve by joining the faction, and a faction leader will respond in kind.

As most shadowrunners might imagine, the Rite of Wishes is a big deal, as courtiers savvy enough to understand the layers of meaning present in every gesture, in every word, will unlock the secrets of a faction and two of its members. Thus far, the Rite of Wishes has only been performed in public a total of four times; twice for Aes Sidhe Banrigh, once for the Hermit and, surprisingly, once for Dragon.

Red Tape, Blood Ties

The day-to-day affairs of the court may shift at the whims of Lady Brane Deigh where the factions are concerned. In recent months, she has held several meetings with Liam O'Connor in order to discuss possibilities for cataloguing the members of the Seelie Court through various forms of identification. In centuries past, this wasn't as much of an issue, for the size of the Court was smaller than it is today. Now, however, as the Lady's attention is drawn beyond the borders of her Court, the need to ensure each member is accounted for is so significant, the Tuatha de Danaan have begun to dabble in the dark arts, such as thaumaturgical rituals, to ensure the doors will only open for those faeries who belong in them. The census being conducted by Renraku is believed to be a part of their larger population [illegible].

Visitors, human and metahuman, typically do not attend an initiation or the Rite of Wishes, as they are forbidden to fully join a faction. Only official members of the Seelie Court possess this right—much to the chagrin of the remaining Wild Fae. Still, there are many ways to participate in the goals of a faction without becoming a full-fledged member, and many visitors have racked up a munera debt—or earned themselves a positive balance—in their effort to curry favor and build alliances.

It should also be noted that, though courtiers do have the free will to follow their hearts (and minds) when they wish, most members of the Seelie Court are under continuous scrutiny. Thus, should any courtier seek to ally themselves with one of the lesser known or more dangerous factions that conspire against the will of the Seelie Court, they should do so with extreme caution.

Shadowrunners may want to think twice about joining a faction or even incurring a munera debt—unless their job requires it. Even then, they should be well compensated and know that doing so puts them at odds with the Tuatha de Danaan and all of faerie. They can, however, find allies in every corner of the Court. The question runners should be asking themselves is: "What does this faerie want?" And, "Will I suffer consequences if this deal goes bad?"

Known Factions

"Obsessed by a fairy tale, we spend our lives searching for a magic door and a lost kingdom of peace."

– EUGENE O'NEILL,
FIFTH WORLD PLAYWRIGHT

Peace. It is suspected that all courtiers desire it, but no two faeries can agree on what it means. Ironically, the factions do not represent aligned philosophies, either. Rather, any one faction might be pegged as being either for or against the traditional rule of the Tuatha de Danaan. After all, what else do the courtiers have to compare their beliefs to, if not what came before? For this reason, some members of the Seelie Court speculate that all factions, except for the loyalists, might be considered part of the Unseelie Faction. This is not truly the case, however, for disagreeing with Lady Brane Deigh does not result in capital punishment. In truth, the factions grant her more freedom to rule because they help occupy the minds and hearts of her courtiers—which keeps their eyes off

of her day-to-day meetings and decisions. The more her people concern themselves with theoretical ideologies and philosophies, the greater the opportunity she has to identify the true threats to her crown.

To date, the Seelie Court has identified ten unique factions active today. Only time will tell if more will be exposed, or if the existing factions will survive long enough to influence matters of the Court.

Aes Sidhe Banrigh

"There is only one Queen, and She watches over all. You may not think She's dangerous, but never forget whose side She is on."

Nickname(s): Daughters of the Wind, Breeders (Vulgar), Sisters (or Brothers), Wind-Charmers, Sun-Chasers (Vulgar)

Motto: We sow the seeds of hope, planted in the past, that will bear fruit for our future.

Token (or Symbol): Pomegranate, Wheat, Hyacinth. The hyacinth has been adopted as a show of support for Lady Brane Deigh and, as such, is the most commonly found symbol in Court. Its presentation and color hold significant meaning for the viewer, above and beyond any professed loyalty for the sitting ruler. White, for example, means a faerie has forsaken having his/her own children in order to adopt orphans of the Court. These "orphans" might be unsponsored courtiers

or visitors, abandoned courtiers who have run afoul of their patron, or literal faerie children. As another example, bright, purplish-pink hyacinths, when combined with other summery flowers like the tiger lily and the sunny daisy, means that faerie wishes to conceive—either literally or figuratively—during Midsummer Night. Though the colors are not specific to fertility rituals, they often hold double meanings that are apropos of the unique culture this faction has developed.

Description: Rooted in ancient symbols of fertility in physical and ideological ways, the Aes Sidhe Banrigh faction is often disregarded by outsiders as a fertility cult solely concerned with ensuring the Tuatha de Danaan remain healthy and produce offspring. Fertility is one aspect of the original tarot card, and Lady Brane Deigh has adopted it and the faction for herself. Aes Sidhe Banrigh is concerned with the cycle of the metaphorical harvest, its impact on the environment, and the mythical Mother Nature (or Gaia, Artemis, Isis, etc.) who is responsible for all living things. Iconic to a fault, Aes Sidhe Banrigh has a darker side, as well, for in order for growth to happen Mother Nature must be present. Her ways unknowable and secretive, her absence would disrupt the cycle of growth. Here, the symbolism is clear: should Lady Brane Deigh abandon her rule, the Court would plunge into darkness.

Organization: Many-pronged, with Lady Brane Deigh at its epicenter, forming branches that extend to all corners of the Seelie Court. Members of the faction tend to operate in cells that form to complete short-term, if not cyclical, goals. These goals might be physical, spiritual, or intellectual, and they must be declared during the Rite of Wishes. Similar to the Magician faction, Aes Sidhe Banrigh also interconnects courtiers with one another based on these common goals. Some individual members, however, prefer to remain unattached, as they belong to the faction not for the betterment of others, but for personal gain or out of a grudging respect for their sitting ruler.

Goals: To foster a sense of belonging and help Seelie Court members understand they are a part of the future (public). To show visiting metahumans and humans that the Seelie Court is a unified front that rallies behind its leader (public). To ceremonially revel in the seasonal bounties the Court and its members have to offer (public). To keep an eye on all courtiers and uncover the identity of all factions including the Unseelie Court (secret). To manipulate the bloodlines of the fae and keep the Tuatha de Danaan in power for eons to come (secret). To recruit all courtiers and bind their loyalties to the Court (private).

Membership & Recruitment: The Aes Sidhe Banrigh faction is unique in that all sitting members of the Seelie Court are treated as its members by default. Lady Brane Deigh has woven together the threads of this tarot card with the manner in which she rules her court, and the symbolism of the harvest can be found everywhere a courtier might look. Fresh, wintry pines provide shelter from the snow and witch hazel heals and cleans wounds, tulips bloom and caterpillars hatch in the spring, raspberries, strawberries, and melons ripen in the heat of the summer, and tall stalks of wheat and corn are harvested in the fall, alongside plump pumpkins and fresh squash. Lush banquets incorporate hyacinths and the fruits of each season, and all are invited to partake in the bounty of the Seelie Court. Here, then, is where the members of the faction show their true colors; courtiers are scrutinized closely, as their rivals attempt to decipher the colors they wear, what foods they eat, and who they associate with. Hidden in plain sight, the Aes Sidhe Banrigh faction is filled with so much innuendo and meaning, even its members are not sure what its purpose is other than to support Lady Brane Deigh.

HISTORY

The tarot card on which the faction was founded, Aes Sidhe Banrigh, was an anonymous gift presented to the Seelie ruler during a Midsummer Night event. The bearer has never stepped forward, the faerie responsible has yet to be identified by the Queen's spies, and other courtiers have all but forgotten the event.

The card was encased in a hermetically-sealed box woven from the pliable branches of an orange tree, and it was enchanted to open only at Lady Brane Deigh's touch. Like the tall pines that serve as the Court's pillars, the Queen discovered that the box was still alive and eventually, long into the night, the "tree" bore ripening fresh fruit that could be plucked and eaten. Within the box, on a bed of colorful hyacinths, the Aes Sidhe Banrigh card glistened like a fresh watermelon. Dripping with mana, surrounded by a show of support for her throne, the Lady was moved to tears for the first time in anyone's memory.

Beneath the flowers, the Lady later found this plainly written letter, which has since been recorded into the Book of Memories:

My dearest Brane,

You may not remember me, as it has been long since our paths crossed, but I recall the time we spent together fondly. The first moment I saw you, you were drowning in golden sunlight, and your hair glistened like diamonds. I was bewitched by you, and haunted by the worrying look in your eye. Who troubled you so, m'lady? I thought to myself. Who would dare to hurt such a vision of loveliness, purer and more beautiful than the hyacinths you were always found of?

And then I saw the object of your distress. It was a man. Portly, ill-shaven, and decidedly ork, wearing clothes so stiff and strange they could only be from one place: Tír na nÓg. I felt how conflicted you were, the panic that gripped your heart, the icy steel that ran through your veins, knowing that ork had been sent to rip the life from you. I saw you standing there, grieving for the life you had yet to live, prepared to die—and then? As that monster raised his meaty fists? You stepped neatly aside, removed your tiara, then whirled toward me, cheeks flushed with anger and confusion, for in that moment you noticed I was there. So you hesitated, you stopped for one terrifying second, giving the assassin time to strike. And I, the cause. I, a servant of the Crown.

I remember screaming in anguish, horrified that I had unwittingly brought you pain, and startling your enemy until he focused all of his considerable attention on me. I remember you seizing that moment, that precious pearl I had handed you, for while the ork was distracted you sliced his neck with your crown. Blood spurted everywhere—on the freshly-tended spring grass, on your fine tunic, on the clover and pixie's breath dotting the field.

On me, my, and I. On the One who knew you from Before, waiting in the darkness, drawn always toward your Light, sleeping beneath in the dark, vitamin-rich soils that nurtured me. The ork's hot blood startled me—was this the War of Sorrows? I had forgotten so many things, and you helped me remember.

I send this token of my affection for your kindness and your bravery. Ours is a relationship borne in the moment of death, and I know you took a great risk to help me, as I did you.

Yours until the Dawn,

— F

Though the letter has been documented for the benefit of the Court, Lady Brane Deigh considers its contents to be of a highly personal nature and refuses to speak of it further. The letter's author may have been a former lover or one of her many secret admirers; only she knows the identity of her anonymous admirer. Regardless, any curious inquiries are met with laughter, scorn, or disdain, for the Lady understands that some secrets are best kept close to her heart—and away from those who would use such feelings against her.

REPRESENTATIVE(S)

In addition to Lady Brane Deigh, the representatives of this faction are connected to ranking Court positions. Those who surround and support the throne are all given the opportunity to speak for the Lady at the appropriate moment. In fact, there is a lot of pomp and circumstance associated with the Aes Sidhe Banrigh's representatives, and it is impossible not to notice them. More concerning, however, are the members of the Seelie Court who do not want to be associated with the sitting ruler. These might include the following:

- **Wild Fae**: Though wild faeries are not nearly as numerous as they once were, several species live and die of their own accord without ever visiting the Court. Some, however, do attend seasonal ceremonies and similar rituals out of respect for the sitting ruler, and to pledge their support. Those who are never seen in Court tend to concern members of this faction, because the Aes Sidhe Banrigh holds every faerie responsible for their part in the cycle. By ignoring an invitation or hiding from view, the Wild Fae open themselves up to speculation and gossip. And, where there are questions, there might be an investigation—especially in this era.
- **Servants**: Despite claims to the contrary, the Aes Sidhe Banrigh's members are still fixated on the Court's ruling hierarchy, and place a lot of value on those who sit closest to the throne. Thus, anyone who falls beneath their notice tends to be ignored or forgotten. Many of the servants do not bother pledging themselves toward a faction, for they consider them to be a distraction from the real problems that threaten the Court. Should courtiers bother to listen to those who serve them, they might be surprised to find out how many feel powerless and enslaved, and that one day they, like the courtiers they dress every day, might organize a faction of their own.
- **Foreign Dignitaries**: The Seelie Court entertains many visitors, and often ceremonies are couched in the trappings of the Aes Sidhe Banrigh faction. While it has been decreed that no human may join a faction, foreign dignitaries—which include Liam O'Connor—can and are encouraged to join a faction as an ally. To date, not one visitor has done so, and this has not gone unnoticed by the members of the Aes Sidhe Banrigh. What this means for the faction remains to be seen, but some propose that Court loyalists can and should recruit members who are willing to perform the Rite of Wishes.

In addition to these three, many personages attend the lavish banquets and grand ceremonies of the Court but do not consider themselves members of the Aes Sidhe Banrigh for a variety of personal and political reasons. These individuals, like the courtiers themselves, are likely rivals or future enemies who would undermine Lady Brane Deigh's leadership. Most members of the Aes Sidhe Banrigh, then, would probably be relieved to know that these personages are not unknown to the sitting ruler. The Lady, when pressed for answers, often quips: "The humans have a saying that I find appropriate to recall in these instances. It is never the devil you know that is the problem. The devil you don't—now that is the evil we need to concern ourselves with."

Bastard

"His name was Percy, you asshole. Not 'Giggles' or 'Pocket' or 'Tom Fool'. Percy. And she killed him."

Nickname(s): Twitch-Ears (vulgar), Mirror-Gazers, Wanderers.

Motto: If you can't find the entrance to the Path, then forge a new one.

Token (or Symbol): Birch tree

Description: Tied to the premier arcana card in the Sixth World tarot deck, the Bastard represents the beginning of a journey (physical, spiritual, intellectual, etc.) and the thrill of adventure. In its negative aspect, the Bastard is the literal representation of Alexander Pope's line from An Essay on Criticism (1717): "For fools rush in where angels fear to tread."

Organization: Flat, but encourages volunteers to act on the faction's behalf. Members can decide to become spokespersons or mediators to further the faction's interests, which are highly variable and adapt based on the faeries involved.

Goals: To help new courtiers adjust to life in the Seelie Court (public). To give existing courtiers room to find their own identity, despite the pressures of their position or family (public). To help anyone, regardless of status or affiliation, break free from a past they no longer want, to follow their own path (secret). To treat everyone the same, and disregard the trappings of titles, money, or possessions, for we are all on our own journey (secret).

Membership & Recruitment: On the surface, the Bastard faction seems to count several courtiers among their number. Often misrepresented as the "anarchy" faction, Wild Fae are drawn to the Bastard, until they realize its members do not want to stage a coup or upset the politics of the Court. Members tend to recruit initiates by appealing to their need for individualism and freedom, but it is not uncommon for new recruits to quickly abandon the faction once they are fed up experimenting with taboos because they realize how challenging it is to walk a path of their own volition. The faction also draws natural leaders, intellectuals, and sages who are convinced the path they follow does not have to be a literal one, as their path can be metaphorical or, for some, metaphysical. It is not uncommon for members to belong to this faction in addition to another one, as members suspect the Bastard's agenda can be customized to fit one's needs.

HISTORY

The history of the Bastard faction is, in many ways, the history of all the factions. Most courtiers were taught that Percy Towser, the Court Jester who served over ten years ago, founded the faction—but this is not entirely true. While it can be confirmed that Percy recruited new members and was a prominent emissary, the Bastard faction itself was not created of his own volition.

The idea of the Bastard faction is tied to the notion that the Sixth World Tarot was not simply a deck of cards, but a tool the Tuatha de Danaan had in their possession to divine the future and retain their leadership throughout the passing of time. To hold a card in one's hand, as Percy used to say, would be to own a Fifth World magical artifact, older than the trees of the Seelie Court, and far more powerful. To hold the card, however—the Bastard that represents the first archetype and iconic symbol for the entire deck—would shake the foundations of the Seelie Court. Such talk, at first, was deemed treacherous, for courtiers believed Percy was betraying himself as a member of the Unseelie Court.

In truth, by the time Percy came forward to voice his opinions, he already had the card in his possession, as it was given to him by his predecessor and mentor, Auntie Foole. Percy had, on several occasions, attempted to recruit members but to no avail, for his representation and standing in the Court put him in a precarious position. Though no courtier will admit they have seen Percy holding the Bastard card for themselves, it is often talked about that this is the reason why the Court Jester was killed—and it was Lady Brane Deigh, herself who ordered his murder, though her motives for such an action remain murky.

Presently, the whereabouts of the card have not been publicly revealed, but it is suspected that a member of the Seelie Court is guarding it. Whether its owner is a Bastard faction member or not is unclear, and some courtiers fear that the Unseelie Court not only has it, but is using it to sow the seeds of discord.

Few, if any, members of the Bastard faction have been publicly revealed out of fear they'll be associated with Percy and they, too, will be arrested, kidnapped, or murdered. In secret, the faction's membership is said to include the ranks of low-and high-ranking courtiers who, despite the propaganda, support the spirit of the faction and its push toward following one's heart.

REPRESENTATIVE(S)

Tsukiko the Kappa

Born under the light of a full moon, Tsukiko was once a Wild Faerie who lived near a river of clear water. When Tsukiko came of age, her elders taught her how to set traps for her victims to lure them beneath the surface of the water. For whatever reason, Tsukiko abhorred the practice and considered it barbaric, for she could not justify bringing harm to another faerie without just cause. Thwarting the traditions of her fellow kappa, Tsukiko made the pilgrimage to the Seelie Court and petitioned for amnesty—but was granted none.

Fearing repercussions from the Wild Fae, Tsukiko's request was denied on the basis of her young age, and she was sent home. Disappointed, the young kappa refused to give up her wish to become a courtier

and instead decided to demonstrate what might happen if she rejoined her fellow kappa in the River of Glass. Angry, frustrated, and feeling utterly alone, Tsukiko marched toward the Fountain of Regret, which symbolized the tears shed for those who died in faerie-on-faerie violence, and lured the nearest body to her side, drowning it in a shallow fountain.

Luckily for Tsukiko, the young kappa had unwittingly murdered a known and dangerous enemy of the Court—a greedy, self-absorbed human merchant who had been blackmailing several high-ranking leaders for some time. Outwardly, the Court was shocked and outraged, promising an investigation for the benefit of any Sixth World citizens who witnessed the murder; inwardly, courtiers and royals alike were relieved that their secrets—and lives—would be safe now that the bullish human had died.

Though Tsukiko could not be publicly rewarded for the loyalty she showed to the Seelie Court, she was privately granted the boons she sought. To all outsiders, it was declared that the kappa's punishments were harsh but appropriate; she was stripped of her rank (though she had none), kept apart from her family (which is what she wanted all along), and given a symbolic sponsor to help her learn the ways of the Court. To retain the pretense that Tsukiko was being punished, the Court officiated over a mock ceremony to welcome her, and commanded the Court Jester, Percy Towser, to educate the kappa on how to be a proper courtier.

To the shock and surprise of many, Percy took his responsibility seriously, and began by helping Tsukiko abandon her past to learn how to become a courtier. Loyalists did not realize Percy was, in fact, as opportunistic as every other faerie, and the "gift" of Tsukiko allowed Percy to have what he so desperately needed: an ally. Perhaps that is why, many surmise, Percy disappeared. He had always opined about starting a faction, but once other courtiers knew he was serious, he became the biggest threat of all.

Tsukiko represents a courtier on the beginning of the path to greatness, and she strives to be an example of the faction that represents her beloved mentor. Though other Bastard initiates often fall prey to rash decisions and indecisiveness, Tsukiko is one of the few courtiers who truly illustrates the best of what her faction has to offer. She is unflinchingly loyal to the memory of Percy Towser, and in his absence she has become the de facto ruler of the Bastard faction.

Duke Flowerpot

Duke Flowerpot was born Matthew Mac Gabhann to his parents, Duke Berit and Duchess Sorcha, and his prominence in the faction (and, by a lesser extent, the Seelie Court) is partly due to his storied and royal heritage. Though the Mac Gabhann family tree is not, technically, one of the official ruling families of the Tuatha de Danaan, they are loosely related.

The origin of the Mac Gabhann matriarchy can be traced all the way back to the beginning of the Fifth World, when Viona the Just secretly married Kiernan the Selkie, in the aftermath of an unusual battle during the War of Sorrows. Viona the Just was a legendary warrior-priestess of the fae who philosophized that spilled faerie blood would curse the fabric of the metaplane. A capable fighter, Viona pledged to end conflicts without drawing a single drop of blood—a claim that temporarily earned her the title "Viona the Traitor." The legends say that Viona abandoned her armies and entered the glens and forests and seashores to seek an audience with the generals who commanded the Wild Fae. As she walked, she stripped herself of all her armor and her weaponry, until eventually she arrived on the shores of the Waking Sea. Alone and defenseless, Viona strolled along the beach until she came before two faerie tribes, selkies and sylphs, embroiled in a heated argument. Upon noticing Viona, Kiernan assumed she was a mermaid and hailed her to act as their mediator, as is the way of the Wild Fae. The selkie were upset that the sylphs had suffered less than their clans had, and felt it was unfair that the sylphs abstained from fighting. The sylphs, on the other hand, were offended that the selkies had claimed territorial rule over their breeding grounds and, while they understood the selkie's grief, they should not be punished for their loss.

Upon hearing the two sides, Viona thought carefully and decided to render an unusual judgment. "I give to you my Self," she said, "that you might use this body, the body of a Tuatha de Danaan—your enemy—in place of bloody retribution. Do to it what you will, so that you may find peace." When Kiernan refused, Viona whispered: "No one can Make me, for I Maketh Myself." This saying, the same words embroidered on Duke Flowerpot's tunic in Gaelic, is an iconic representation of the Bastard faction. At the end of Viona's journey, she did not find peace. At the edge of the Waking Sea, she discovered more violence and was willing to sacrifice herself to end a fight she was marginally involved in.

Placing her life in the hands of a total stranger, naked and alone, Viona was reborn by her own hand—and she survived the encounter.

Duke Flowerpot is a typical member of the Bastard faction. His long and storied heritage is one he can never truly abandon, and in many ways the Mac Gabhann name benefits him still. He was briefly considered for the position of Court Jester, primarily out of respect for his family. However, Duke Flowerpot secretly loathes the fact that he has never truly come into his own and has joined the Bastard faction because he is desperate to find himself. To that end, Duke Flowerpot is considered vain, dresses flamboyantly as it suits him—hence his nickname—and changes allegiances to various factions and courtiers quite frequently. He considers these secondary pledges to be part and parcel to his membership in the Bastard faction, as he'll often profess that "understanding the affairs of the Court will help me know my place, as a Mac Gabhann, a courtier, and as a faerie of the Seelie Court." To those who know him, Duke Flowerpot is concerned for no one but himself and, at the same time, holds the ideal of individualism in such high regard he willingly recruits and sponsors new initiates into his faction, so that they might find their own Path.

Comet

"You may think lightning can't strike here, but I guarantee you that it can, and you'll be sorry when it does."

Nickname(s): Doomsayers, Cultists, Fire-Starters, Flame Hair (vulgar)

Motto: The trail you blaze can only be seen with the help of the sun.

Token (or Symbol): Falling Star, Phoenix, Maple Tree, Song of the Spheres (non-visual).

Description: Some factions exist to counteract the power of an opposing faction, and the Comet is one such entity. Its sole purpose is to destroy that which the Hermit faction sets out to do, by focusing on unity, compromise, and harmony over isolation and retreat, even if it's self-imposed. Unity, however, for the sake of acting as a group is not necessarily always positive, and members of the Comet faction often fall prey to the End Times hysteria that occasionally sweeps through the Court. To the rest of the Court, this faction represents the many faces of sudden destruction and rebirth that are due to rapid changes and, as such, courtiers have varied opinions about them.

Organization: Flat. Occasionally, a flamboyant personage, like the Star-Seeker, might claim to be the leader of a cult, but this is a stereotype the Comet faction's members use to their advantage. Other factions think the Comet faction is modeled after a Sixth World doomsday cult, such as D.A.D. (Dragonlings After Dark), but in reality the Comet's members tend toward unpredictability and chaos. If ever there was a faction rooted in complete and total anarchy, then the Comet is one such force. But, like all things within the Seelie Court, there is a significant gap between the courtier who sacrifices themselves to make a point, a believer who organizes a Wild Fae protest, and a faction member that destroys years of policy and outreach for the sake of doing so.

Goals: To bring sudden and unexpected change (public). To thwart the thinkers and schemers of the Hermit faction whenever possible (public). To build alliances with the material plane (public). To use alliances to build power with the aim of ruling over the Seventh World (secret). To amass stockpiles of magical artifacts and resources to survive the dawning of the Seventh World (secret). To ally with the Hanged Man faction (secret). To either ally with or found the Unseelie faction (secret). To triumph over the Hermit, Death, Magician, and Aes Sidhe Banrigh factions (secret).

Membership & Recruitment: The Comet faction relies on propaganda and word-of-mouth to recruit members to its many causes. As a whole, the faction is utterly convinced that they exist to help the Court align with the material world in a harmonious way, by shocking its members into action. Like many of the factions, its members are split as to how to do just that—and they refuse to acknowledge how fractured their group is. The faction's lofty ideals are also problematic, in the sense that they tend to hold religious sway over the naïve and unsuspecting. The Comet's goals are long-term and based on an idyllic sense of belonging that is not possible in the Seelie Court due to its monarchial structure. It should come as no surprise that the Tuatha de Danaan believes members of this faction tend to be dreamers rather

than doers. Their factions' reputation does not matter to active members of the Comet, for what they lack in resources they make up for in physical bodies, and no other faction—save the Unseelie—can make that claim. This is especially true in the sense that some members of the Comet faction are more pragmatic than others, and they want to bring about positive changes as a counterbalance to the Hermit faction's slow and methodical thought processes.

HISTORY

The best manner in which to relay the history of the Comet faction is to share the inaugural announcement recorded in the Book of Memories. The press release was also sent to representatives of both Tír nations, as well.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Comet Card Unearthed on Visit with Algonkian-Manitou Council Chief

20 *Feabhra*. While on a tour of Lake Winnipegosis with revered Ceremonial Chief Laura Hawksford, Sixth World cartographer, Brennus Cléireach discovered the Comet tarot card that had been frozen stuck to a statue honoring the Bear family.

"I wish to express my deepest gratitude to all three honored Algonkian-Manitou Council Chiefs for understanding how much this find means to the Seelie Court, and for negotiating its return. If not for their empathy and wisdom, I would not have been able to present the Comet card before the Court today," said Cléireach. "Inspired by your leadership, I hope my beloved faeries will also live by your example. In recognition of your wisdom, I invite you to attend a banquet held in your honor, and hope that you'll accept the gift of a magical artifact of your choosing from our plane in return."

The card has since been confirmed as a significant and iconic part of the Sixth World tarot deck, and its discovery has led to a discussion about exploring the earthly plane to find more of them. During the banquet, Cléireach will announce his departure for a new expedition to Seattle, and will offer the card to his protégé, Amara the Golden-Haired.

REPRESENTATIVE(S)

Moira the Leshii

Moira the Leshii is an example of a stereotypical, starry-eyed courtier who best represents the impassioned heralds and seekers of change within the faction. She is also one of the few leshii who has transcended her species' status as foot soldiers and moved into leadership, showing greater alacrity and alertness than her kin. Despite rumors to the contrary, there is no such thing as a cult per se in this faction, though many courtiers like Moira demonstrate and plan protests from time to time.

Moira is a former member of the Wild Fae, and a recent addition to the Court as well. Moira was recruited to join the Court as a spy, working for the Tuatha de Danaan to identify and root out any traitors. Unfortunately, with the rise of the various factions and their power, Moira was tasked with spying on many members of the ruling families without their knowledge by pretending to be their children and lovers, parents and cousins, friends and rivals. After a few months of acting in this manner, Moira realized that she could never afford to make a mistake, for if her identity were ever be discovered, she would likely be killed. Instead of running away, Moira resented the precarious and potentially life-threatening position she'd been placed in and joined the Comet faction to express her anger in a public and political manner.

Now Moira has turned her association with the faction into a platform for political activism, but she is not prepared or knowledgeable enough about Court matters to influence long-term changes. Thus, her calls for justice fall flat among many, and she is not taken seriously—not even as a threat—because she has little support, due more to her abilities than her position.

Moira is championing the need to offset the oppressive leadership of the Seelie Court with a harmonious democracy instead of a monarchy. She does not want the Seelie Court to be destroyed. Rather, she believes that the political process must include the faeries who are too afraid of the Tuatha de Danaan to stand up for themselves.

Unfortunately, Moira the Leshii is practically the only courtier who's convinced this is possible, as most courtiers understand that the Court considers her beliefs to be a pretty fantasy. Moira is not to be dismissed, however, for she can and will influence other courtiers

who are more capable of implementing change. If she doesn't, she will likely be a metaphorical comet whose tail is only visible when it gets closest to the sun who, in this case, is Lady Brane Deigh.

Death

"Why are you crying?
Don't you know that eventually everyone and everything must die?
This is natural, for frak's sake!"

Nickname(s): Unseelie (vulgar), Necromancers (vulgar), Corpse-Dealers (vulgar), Reapers, Witnesses, The Silent Ones.

Motto: We are the Urn that Holds your Ashes. We are the Reaper who Takes your Soul.

Token (or Symbol): Ossuary, Urn, Corpse-Flower, Vultures, Mushrooms, Scythes

Description: The cycle of life cannot exist without death, and though all members of the Seelie Court know this, they cannot bring themselves to acknowledge the existence of the Death faction. Its meaning is stark and brutal—that death is necessary. Though every faerie is born, one day they, too, must die. The question, then, is why the courtiers are so afraid of this faction. The answer is, in part, due to the timing and nature of a death, for whether that ending is metaphorical or literal, the members of the Death faction intentionally seek to study the ending of all things. And, if they deem that the focus of their study needed to die a long time ago, they will take that matter into their own hands. Like the Hanged Man, Death brings about a change—but this is not always natural. Worse, this faction is sympathetic to the Unseelie Court, for they, too, are mistaken that the Seelie Court is past the point of resurrection and is slowly decaying. In its positive sense, the Death faction can be a force of positive change, for it is true that everything has a beginning and an ending. However, Death can be negative, too, because despite the fact that the faeries involved consider themselves to be omnipotent to control this natural cycle, they are clearly not. Thus, when depicted in the negative aspect, the Death faction is the blockage that prevents positive changes from happening, and lingers on indecisively, not knowing where to cut in order to allow new growth to flourish.

Organization: Hierarchical. The structure of the Death faction follows, ironically so, a hierarchical structure based on how many "deaths," either metaphorical or literal, its members have caused. Though the reapers, as they refer to themselves, will not resort to murder, they are not beneath other means of causing a death that they can prove to the other members of their faction.

Goals: To ensure that the cyclical nature of life and death proceeds as it should (public). To witness and honor the dead, especially those who have fallen in the War of Sorrows (public). To seek an end to the old traditions that do not serve the current Court (secret). To usher in a new war when the time is right, to cull the herd. (secret).

Membership & Recruitment: True to its stereotype, the Death faction is the most enigmatic and secretive of all the factions. Reapers conduct secret meetings and have developed elaborate rituals to identify one another, the Rite of Wishes is conducted in privacy between two ranking members and an initiate, and no one—not even the reapers themselves—are aware of the other's existence in public. This is a faction where any and all may be subject to the sweep of a sharp scythe, and its members live precariously for fear that they might be culled prematurely. Due to its sensitivity toward the Unseelie Court and its aims, many courtiers suspect that the Death faction also contains several Unseelie Court members, and it is for this reason that its antithesis—the Aes Sidhe Banrigh faction—operates so openly as a show of strength for its members and the Tuatha de Danaan. Unfortunately, given its visceral nature and determination, the faction has been banned from openly operating in Court, which has restricted how its members operate. Death, to the Seelie, is not viewed favorably, for they have sold themselves on the idea of immortality which may, ironically, bring about their doom.

HISTORY

Death leaves a heartache
no one can heal;
Love leaves a memory no
one can steal.

-IRISH PROVERB

To the fae, the concept of death is as old as Time, but to understand it, courtiers must remember a specific goddess named Brigit the Healer, Daughter of Dagda, Protector of Poets, and Keeper of the Sacred Fire. Brigit is no longer named as such, for She has not been written about by the Seelie Court since the ending of the Fourth World.

Brigit, the patron of healers, watched over the Tuatha de Danaan with a loving but firm hand. When a mysterious plague swept through the Court long ago, it was to Her that the healers wrote their prayers, and into Her hands that their lives were placed. Largely, the way in which courtiers approached Brigit remained static for some time; when a faerie died, then, their life was celebrated instead of mourned, and Brigit was thanked instead of shunned.

The funerary rituals surrounding the dead, up until the War of Sorrows, were a kind of vigil that took place in the dead of night. In the Era of the Gilded Lily, the body of the fae and their physical possessions would be covered with dried flowers and herbs that, when lit, would release the essence of the faerie's soul into the air as a prayer. This fire would remain alight until the ending of the ceremony; a faerie—dressed as Brigit—would tend to this sacred flame for the duration of the proceedings.

Visitations were not sorrowful. Instead of crying, they celebrated that person's life through an artistic performance—songs sung, poetry read aloud, paintings painted—designed to tell the dead's story to show the full spectrum of how they affected others. These remembrances were often either recorded into the Book of Memories or given away to other faeries in attendance as a show of respect. Often, too, courtiers considered it to be a sign of honor if a funeral was well attended, for the greater the influence the dead had, the more art that was made, and the more that could be given away in remembrance.

During this event, a choir of performers would also sing a special magical incantation called the Rite of Tears that affected the minds and hearts of the attending courtiers, giving them a heightened sense of emotion and shared empathy as part of the experience. When the fire was lit, the spell's effect would end, the Court would say good-bye, and then depart in silence.

In addition to this archaic ceremony, there have been many other rituals, ceremonies, and practices to help the living deal with the dead's passage. It wasn't until the War of Sorrows, however, that all fae began to fear death as a species, for this was the first time they experienced loss on a massive scale. As the bodies mounted on the battlefield, there was no time to perform elaborate ceremonies or carefully care for the vessels that once held life. The fae, out of necessity, built funerary pyres that could burn hundreds of faeries instead of one at a time. The blazing fires dotting the countryside, combined with the inability to grieve, deeply affected the fae—especially since the War of Sorrows had begun because they could not bury the dead they had lost. In a short period of time, the core tenets of their beliefs shifted to acknowledge, but turn their backs on, the endings of all things. And as a result, they mourned another loss, the "death" of Brigit, and then forgot she ever existed.

One lesser-known family never forgot the ancestral tradition, and they handed down the story of Brigit and the Rite of Tears from generation to generation. This family, of the Ó Raghallaigh clan, is not related to the Tuatha de Danaan but can trace their lineage from healer to midwife to wizened sage through the centuries. This, too, is recorded in the Book of Memories in a short series of passages that describe a widower teaching his young daughter how to properly mourn the loss of her mother. Thus, it is believed that the Ó Raghallaigh clan has had the Death tarot card in their possession for centuries, waiting and preparing for the day when its magic would be needed the most, and they will produce it when the Seelie Court needs it the most.

In the current Court, the traditions and rites that concern the dead have shifted to incorporate Fifth World ideologies. Some courtiers believe that the crow and the reaper, symbols that have never existed in the Court until very recently, will allow the fae to complete the grieving process that they were never allowed to finish so many centuries ago.

In truth, what the Death faction represents is a rekindled hope for the future, buried in a centuries-long process of grieving that will one day result in healing and understanding and, as the Ó Raghallaigh clan hopes, the return of Brigit.

REPRESENTATIVE(S)

True to their enigmatic reputation, there are no official representatives of the Death faction, not even among the Ó Raghallaigh clan. Known only by their nickname, "reapers," its members are strongly and tightly fixated on being identified as symbols rather than courtiers, and work very hard to remove their identities when participating in faction-specific discussions, rituals, performances, etc. This is by design, because many reapers fear what might happen if any one individual were associated with the Death tarot card since the Court has yet to fully come to grips with the fact that death is, in fact, a part of life.

Dragon

"Sorry, you call yourself a what now? An adept? Silly human, do you really think your magic is superior to mine?"

Nickname(s): Mana Masters, Mana Hoarders, Lizards (vulgar), Dragon Slaves (vulgar), True Fae, Heart of the Seelie.

Motto: By right and by line, we are the True Fae.

Token (or Symbol): Snapdragons, Yin and Yang, Golden Egg

Description: Stereotypes about the haughtiness and arrogance of the True Fae can be tied to the members of the Dragon faction. Though many of its members may be exemplary courtiers and mana conservationists, this faction is composed of faeries who treat themselves as superior over all other mana users and metahumans—especially humans. This is the faction that is constantly warned that "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." Their racial superiority is not viewed as such, however, by those who belong to this faction, and in its positive aspect a Courtly sense of pride can fuel a type of infectious patriotism most members have not experienced since riding out into battle many centuries ago. This can and is, however, often viewed in its negative aspect as unyielding, authoritarian, malicious, and downright evil in some cases. The concepts of good and evil don't necessarily apply to the members of the Dragon faction—they are so blinded by their own sense of pride they neither care nor understand how others view them.

Organization: Flat, to outsiders. Once initiated, however, members of the Dragon faction quickly realize they must compete to constantly prove just how "true" they are, either by producing volumes of data that supports their claim of being a True Fae, or by providing witnesses that can vouch for their pedigree, their right to use mana, and their status within the Court. Ironically, most faeries, at this point in their history, do not retain a "pure" blood line or a neat family tree with clear branches that can be traced to the beginning of the Fourth World. This does not stop courtiers from obsessing about their heritage, however, especially with regard to the use of mana. Most members will even go so far as to forge a connection with a legendary faerie just to prove they have the right to lay claim to the mana of their metaplane.

Goals: To present a public face of the Seelie Court that impresses upon its visitors their importance (public). To find, possess, and create magical artifacts for the use of its valued and vetted members (public). To prevent outsiders from stripping their metaplane of its mana or its artifacts (secret). To hoard the treasures of their metaplane (secret). To sabotage enemies of the Court who are not True Fae and ensure they remain exiled (secret).

Membership & Recruitment: Much to Lady Brane Deigh's chagrin, the Dragon faction recruits based on a faerie's family history and bloodline. Though there is no such thing as a High Dragon within this faction, its members perform exhaustive investigations into each and every courtier's background in order to prove their worth to the others. Lady Brane Deigh is, in fact, a member of the faction out of necessity, for the Dragon can do what her advisors cannot: research and document courtiers. Courtiers, who hail from other factions, chatter that the Lady would pay handsomely to eliminate the Dragon faction, but unfortunately no other faction is powerful enough to live up to the task, not even the Higher Power, due to the considerable stockpile of magical artifacts the Dragon faction has been able to acquire in a short time. In fact, it is rumored that this is the reason why Lady Brane Deigh wants to keep them close, for only active members have access to such treasures, and to refuse or turn down those items of power could trigger a countermove by their enemies, the Unseelie Court.

HISTORY

The story of the Dragon faction is an ironic one, for it is not tied to familial pride as many courtiers might think. Instead, what the Dragon faction is based on is the

performance of a ritual gone wrong after the discovery of the Dragon tarot card by a group of jealous cousins that had eyes on the throne.

Following the departure of Liam O'Connor, the absence of a ruler generated much discussion, and many courtiers speculated as to whether or not they were worthy enough to become the most powerful personage of the Seelie Court. While Lady Brane Deigh and the more influential and powerful members of the Tuatha de Danaan families were preoccupied, their lesser family members backstabbed and schemed against one another, as jealous courtiers are wont to do. Those who remember the aftermath of O'Connor's departure, coupled with the newly formed fears and anxieties due to the return of mana, speak of the scandals that rocked the Court. Not every courtier agreed with the procession to the throne, and they struggled with their loyalties. Those who didn't find a candidate to back got caught up in "mana mania" and lusted after magical artifacts. Many courtiers rightly considered that if they had *something*—a magical artifact—that could shift the balance of power, they would be considered if not for the throne, then for ranking positions in the new Court as O'Connor's supporters would likely be thrown in jail for treason, or exiled until they were deemed "safe."

The search for these artifacts yielded many old and ineffectual relics, and some courtiers had neither the wit nor the talent to understand what it was they found. Many such individuals, like the traders of trinkets and mementos, presented their wares before the Court but were laughed off and told they were not wanted. Most courtiers, then, turned down their noses on them.

Most, but not all. One courtier, whose identity has never been discovered, purchased large quantities of their stores and set to work sifting through each amulet, pendant, card, book, and branch, testing each and every one of them for magical power. A sale of this kind did not need to be recorded in the Book of Memories, because technically this courtier was purchasing "junk," and no one paid any mind since many were acting erratically during the magical-artifact-hunting crazy. Whoever this courtier was or is had a considerable amount of magical ability, for when an artifact was discovered, its effects were immediate, and the result was felt throughout the Court—for better or for worse.

Within hallowed halls of the Court, many magical protections and safeguards defend the courtiers from hostile spells. One of these defenses is called the Rite of Identification; it is a simplistic ritual that identifies whether or not a spell has been performed in the past and what its intended effects are. Some time ago, shortly before Lady Brane Deigh's inauguration, the Rite of Identification was performed, and the results were announced. Someone had performed the Rite of Magnetic Attraction, and its effects were so powerful the Court fell into a kind of trance, only to be woken when Lady Brane Deigh walked into their room. Unfortunately, the name of the rite was either forcibly removed from the Book of Memories or was never recorded, which made a lot of courtiers suspicious about the odd event. In order for the Rite of Magnetic Attraction to be that powerful, and *that* successful, a magical tarot card—or something equivalent—*had* to be at the center of the spell's power.

To fuel speculation, a number of strange things took place after the "accident," which included the presentation of the Dragon card before the Court, a formal declaration that it did not belong to Lady Brane Deigh, and an elaborately worded pledge to organize a faction based on this card by a group known as The Crimson Order. Confused, frustrated, and seeking answers, many courtiers wonder if a coup had been staged, and the Lady herself performed the rite. Worse, The Crimson Order's key members are none other than keepers of the Book of Memories, and this revelation is sure to have repercussions that reach far above and beyond the formation of the Dragon faction.

If there is some truth to this story, which is not recorded in the Book of Memories or found in any official documents, Lady Brane Deigh can expect a fresh round of scandals that she may never recover from.

REPRESENTATIVE(S)

The Crimson Order

The obsession with familial lineage, coupled with the Dragon faction's desire to avoid handing the Tuatha de Danaan a target to destroy, has led to the formation of a sub-group called The Crimson Order. Or, at least, that's what members of this faction will publicly admit. Unfortunately, this is not actually the case, for The Crimson Order's small and considered membership begins and ends with those who record and maintain the Book of Memories. Past and present recorders are all members of The Crimson Order, but they are not as approachable as other representatives are from other factions.

Oddly, The Crimson Order does not engage in the same levels of propaganda as the rest of the Dragon faction does, either, which begs the questions: "Why is the Book of Memories associated with a faction based on pride?" And, more importantly: "What terrible wrongs were committed against the Book of Memories for them to act in such a bizarre manner?" Many, many courtiers are wondering who was involved in performing the Rite of Magnetic Attraction, and what will happen when the details are revealed. Others are more concerned by the involvement of Book of Memories recorders in a faction, and they worry that this will set a precedent they are not entirely comfortable with.

Eclipse

"If you look real closely, you can see the mana leaking out from our plane, and where the edges of our world meet the others."

Nickname(s): Worry-Warts, Loons (vulgar), Pessimists, Curmudgeons, Tír-Born (vulgar), Plane-Hoppers.

Motto: I fear the dark, for I know what lurks in the shadows.

Token (or Symbol): Silhouettes on a red background, typically displayed or flown as a flag. Members of the Eclipse faction adopt the symbols of the other factions and depict what they fear the most as a black icon, to display their anxiety. If, however, a faction represents something they hope will happen, such as the discovery of other meta- or astral planes containing the fae, that symbol is depicted in full color, either in a rainbow or the current and appropriate colors of the Court.

Description: Born out of observation at the return of mana to their metaplane, the Eclipse faction is founded upon the premise that the future of the Seelie Court depends upon the discovery of other planes containing fae. The faction's members are fixated on the power of belief, and they strive to influence the thoughts of others. Whether their resolutions are a reaction to their anxieties or not, the Eclipse often acts as a mirror to block outside influences in order to show how truly powerful a single faction, organization, country, or entity can be. Thus, they have (and do) defended the Seelie Court to others, but as they tend to be entrenched in the day-to-day affairs of the Court, members tend to be nearsighted and wistfully long for a closer connection to the other planes. Oddly, one aspect of the Eclipse faction is to use subtlety, too, for if they obscure the "view" they normally face, members hope courtiers will wonder what else is out there, and seek what lies in the exact opposite direction.

Organization: Variable, and tied to the structure of the other factions. Members of the Eclipse feel that they fill the gaps where other factions might fail, and though they do not consider themselves to be judgmental, they are in many ways. However, these gaps don't start and stop with existing or known factions, but all unknown on this plane and others as well. The Eclipse faction's activities tend to mirror or slightly shift those of other courtiers, as a means of silently commenting on what they're doing right and what they're doing wrong. For example, recently the Dragon faction committed a faux pas by performing an unnecessary amount of spellwork in front of wageslaves for a small, lesser-known weapons manufacturer who attended Court to set up trade negotiations. Instead of being impressed by them, the wageslaves took the display as a sign that the Seelie Court was threatening their organization, and felt bullied into silence. To counteract their arrogant show of power, the Eclipse faction prepared a short play outlining the horrors of the War of Sorrows, a symbolic gesture to show the humans that they, too, make mistakes.

Goals: To ensure the factions of the Seelie Court are well-balanced (public). To provide commentary on the Court in a non-combative way (public). To find and connect with other meta- and astral planes containing faeries from other cultures (public). To vent frustrations that nothing has changed in the Court, and the factions are not a means to an end (secret). To change Lady Brane Deigh's mind and one day allow members of the Seelie Court to openly leave or abandon their post, and incorporate humans into her rule (secret). To reduce the arrogance and isolationist tendencies of the Court by showing the Tuatha de Danaan they are not the only faeries who matter (secret).

Membership & Recruitment: The Eclipse faction tends to attract courtiers who are fed up with the stereotypes that plague the true nature and goal

possessed by each faction and, by default, the Tuatha de Danaan. This faction is a rare one in the sense that it does not require any formal Rite of Wishes or initiation. To participate, a courtier simply joins a public demonstration they feel is just, and they may leave at any time. The longer and more frequently a courtier participates in the faction's protests and demonstrations, the more weight is placed on that individual courtier's opinion—even though the Eclipse faction prides itself on its open-mindedness. Occasionally, some members will strategically recruit certain influential members of the Court should the occasion call for it. This undertaking is highly political, and courtiers are wise to assess any and all repercussions that may arise from such an invitation.

HISTORY

The history of the Eclipse faction is similar to that of the Hermit, in that a shift of perspective is attributed to its founding.

On October 13, 2061, during the alignment of Earth, its sun, and its moon, a human astronomer named al-Farabi operating the North American Conglomeration Telescope, or NACT for short, noticed something odd. Though total eclipses occurred on a bi-annual basis and, as such, had been thoroughly examined by astronomers for centuries, al-Farabi decided to perform a spectral analysis anyway, as he was wondering how mana would affect his observations. At the time, it was believed that mana was not present elsewhere in the universe and, as such, the search for traces of it was quickly abandoned. Al-Farabi, however, noticed something odd when she analyzed the data from the solar eclipse using the specialized telescope, and later confirmed her theories that night: there was a trace of mana on the moon.

Al-Farabi's revolutionary finding was never confirmed, and further exploration has not found what al-Farabi saw. Many astronomers have openly mocked her findings, though she still has supporters in scientific fields. In one field, though, her work has

more widespread credibility, and that is among Court scholars. Her findings pointed them to a scary set of possibilities: that there may be magical artifacts on the Moon, that mana may be found elsewhere in our universe and, if so, it's assumed (thanks to Occam's Razor) that both are omnipresent throughout multiple universes and planes of existence.

The card itself was not found during the eclipse, but it was discovered at NACT by an anonymous visiting observer from the Seelie Court. This courtier, whose name has never been revealed or recorded in the Book of Memories, speculated that the reason why al-Farabi was able to make this discovery was because she was Awakened, and the telescope she used was a combination artifact and focus that drew power from the Eclipse card. Few courtiers actually believe this theory, for they are aware of the lengths any faerie would go to in order to hide their true intentions. It is more likely the case that a Seelie Court representative planted the card in the observatory after al-Farabi made her findings public, in an effort to obscure the true story of how the Eclipse card was found.

Regardless, shortly after news of the discovery reached the Seelie Court, the card was also reported missing. Further investigations revealed that Novatech had acquired the magical artifact and refused to hand it over to the Seelie Court.

The Eclipse faction was founded (or rediscovered, depending on which stories of the factions you believe) shortly following a declaration that the Seelie Court refused to hire investigators or send spies to retrieve the card from Novatech. At present, the card is believed to remain in their possession, or possibly some other NeoNET subsidiary as the corporation has evolved.

REPRESENTATIVE(S)

Serania the Ancient One

The representative of the Eclipse faction is also one of the mysterious members of the Seelie Court. Suspected to be either a former Wild Fae or a member of the Unseelie Court who renounced her allegiance, Serania the Ancient One has lived so long the story of her life could fill several volumes of the Book of Memories. She is credited with remaining neutral during the War of Sorrows, the slaying of not one, but three dragons, enchanting several magical artifacts, codifying data into plants, and formulating several rites, charms, and spells. Additionally, she is a skilled musician who has mastered the lute and the violin, a painter whose art can move a curmudgeon to tears, and rich repository of information on faerie cultures and traditions that have evolved through the ages.

Serania is an icon some Eclipse faction members refer to as Máthair, and most faeries can only guess at her appearance and whereabouts, for she is always traveling in search of the fae. Serania the Ancient One cares deeply about her people, but she does not believe the Dragon faction's claim that the Tuatha de Danaan's metaplane is the only one in existence. She is afraid that the Tuatha de Danaan will destroy themselves, and everyone else will suffer as a result. Instead of protesting their rule or rejoining the disorganized Unseelie who seek to dismantle and then rebuild the Seelie Court, Serania chooses to act by finding out how other faeries have survived the passage of time in their respective courts. Convinced that other meta- and astral planes may contain other faerie courts from other cultures, the Eclipse faction member has vowed to end her life's journey once she has discovered all of them.

Serania the Ancient One has never been physically seen in Court, and her presence is felt through the exchange of letters or through the sponsorship of young representatives who carry her message. Her words are poetry and her meaning clear; she inspires the Eclipse faction to help other members of the Seelie Court recognize that they can have a sense of pride without being divisive or apathetic. Technically, though Serania's mission and identity are intertwined into the formation of the Eclipse faction, her mission is multi-factional given how important it is for her people to know they are not alone.

Of course, Serania's unusual way of speaking carries multiple meanings, and her letters are often analyzed for deeper intents. Despite the mounting evidence to the contrary, however, members of the Dragon, Bastard, and Higher Power factions are attempting to prove that Serania the Ancient One is not real. Should they succeed, it is likely that the legendary faerie will return to Court to settle her affairs and, on that day, there is no telling what she will reveal or what she will do to block their efforts from impeding her mission.

Hanged Man

"I'm stuck. Wanna help? Gotta warn you, though, I'm broke—so if you plan on helpin', don't be half-assed about it."

Nickname(s): Yellow Ears (vulgar), Con Artists, Twisty-Eyes (vulgar), Anarchists (vulgar), Acrobats

Motto: Everybody hates change, except me. Come and see! Wheeeee!

Token (or Symbol): Bleeding Heart flowers, Treetops, Wanted posters.

Description: Turning the world upside down, the Hanged Man faction exists to challenge the status quo and help stalwart courtiers who obsess about outmoded traditions to live a little. Though they are not anarchists in the traditional sense, the Hanged Man is concerned with challenging perspectives in order to welcome change by any means possible—even if this results in lying to a higher authority or pranking an otherwise serious courtier. In its positive sense, the Hanged Man is a necessary and, at times, unexpected vehicle for change. Negatively, however, the faction can be regarded as a force of chaos that operates without any rhyme or reason to satisfy its own desires as opposed to change for the betterment of all.

Organization: Holacratic, based on goals. Most members ally together for short periods of time in order to challenge perspectives or shock the Court into action. Some Hanged Man initiates might pledge the same goal during the Rite of Wishes for this reason, while others who think long-term may lie about their true aims to avoid discovery. It should be noted that this faction does not associate itself with pranksters, thieves, murderers, or con artists who have adopted the faction's symbolism as an excuse to commit crimes. Because of their loose association with the criminal underground, though, many of the faction's members fall into the trap of explaining or defending the Hanged Man as opposed to fulfilling their pledges, and often abandon their initial reason for joining the faction. Thus, some courtiers are devising new ways to shift the perspectives of the Court. To separate themselves from disreputable types, which have grown to include the Wild Fae, wage- and mageslaves, shadowrunners, and metahuman guests who are poorly equipped to navigate the Seelie Court, courtiers are building stronger relationships with the more conservative elements of the Tuatha de Danaan. In their minds, if they cannot influence the Court as a whole, they might be able to affect the hearts of a few individuals instead, an act that is in line with the faction, but on a small, personalized scale. The ever-shifting needs of the Court, when combined with the various personalities, political views, factions, and other considerations, tends to impact the faction's structure significantly, forcing members to rethink their goals and their associations regularly. Eventually, members who become disillusioned after realizing just how oppressive the status quo can be might abandon the faction in favor of other, more strategic alliances.

Goals: To challenge the status quo (public). To teach others what stale or outdated methodologies might potentially be dangerous (public). To survive and weather the storms of change by instigating it (secret). To destroy factions, such as the Higher Power, that are rooted in secrecy, and eliminate conservative traditions that need to die (secret).

Membership & Recruitment: By the Court's perspective, the Hanged Man is not a desirable faction and, as such, membership tends to be either temporary, which is in line with impulsivity and short-term thinking, or secretive, which reflects long-term aspirations and far-reaching goals. The Hanged Man is one of the few factions that does not recruit its members, because it has no need to. Its philosophy is simply this: A faerie is either willing to accept change, or they aren't. If they are, and they want to be a part of that change, the safest route is to challenge the views of existing courtiers who are stuck in the obsolete Fifth-World ways of doing things. Unfortunately, this also means that every con artist, thief, spy, and forger might claim allegiance to the Hanged Man, as it has become associated with criminals, to seek protection once they are caught and prosecuted. This often obscures the faction's inner workings (a bonus for those who are serious about ushering in an era of change), while ensuring it remains a target for those who view Hanged Man members as pariahs.

HISTORY

The history of the Hanged Man faction has yet to be told in its entirety, for courtiers do not openly speak of its members for fear that they will offend others. Like its members, the story of how this faction formed is known only in bits and pieces, accessible only through testimonies recorded in the Book of Memories. In many ways, courtiers are enamored with the idea of revolution—which is what many of the Tuatha de Danaan fear most—but are too sedentary to overthrow the ruling families and the Seelie Court. Such thoughts lead to darker and more problematic questions that can only be answered by one word: Unseelie.

Laughably, what can be accessed in the Book of Memories about the Hanged Man faction is a bedtime story. This tale, which is a version of the Emperor's New Suit by Hans Christian Andersen, was written as a political allegory/commentary on the affairs of Court that can be analyzed thusly:

- *At the beginning of the story the king wears a new outfit every day, for he is not satisfied with the suits he already owns.* Here, the subject of the fairie tale, whose identity is suspected to be Liam O'Connor, is unhappy with a different type of suit: the four suits of the Sixth World tarot. The opening literally speaks to the fact that O'Connor may have aggressively pursued the acquisition of the Major Arcana because the other magical artifacts were far less powerful.
- *The king is unhappy with his wardrobe, despite the gaiety of his city.* The meaning here places O'Connor in the Seelie Court, and the Book of Memories confirms this to be the case.
- *A pair of swindlers arrives and cons people into believing they are fine and exceptional weavers, possessing elaborate, fine cloths.* This is a direct reference to the appearance of two shadowrunners in the Seelie Court, who were masquerading as magical artifact traders. The shadowrunners, whose true identities were never discovered, were part of the First Expedition to the Seelie Court in the early days of the Sixth World. Their purpose for being in the Court was to find a patron who could decipher a map that pointed to a trove of magical artifacts. To do this, they convinced Liam O'Connor they already possessed what he sought so desperately.
- *The king funds and sponsors the weavers' work.* *O'Connor gave the shadowrunners what they sought, assuming they would turn over what they found.* It is unclear as to whether or not O'Connor knew what the two were up to.
- *Anxious and worried about his investment, the king sends his Chief Advisor and many courtiers to check up on the weavers.* This is a literal translation. The shadowrunners were not, despite the retelling that Lady Brane Deigh and her loyalists might put forth, left to their own devices. O'Connor was many things, but he was not stupid and did not leave the shadowrunners to work in secret. He provided them with advisors and courtiers who watched their every move.
- *Eventually, the town became so impressed with the weavers that their reputation preceded them.* The shadowrunners had charmed the Court and fooled many courtiers.
- *When the king confronted the weavers, he saw naught but air, but he was eventually forced into approving of their great work.* It is unclear how much time was given to the shadowrunners to procure the magical artifacts, but they never did. When O'Connor confronted them, however, he realized that they had the one thing he did not: the support of the Seelie Court.
- *Backed into a corner, the King agrees to put on his beautiful new "suit."* On his own terms, O'Connor decided to call the shadowrunners' bluff, and he brought them before the Court. Surprisingly, the duo was so well-liked, the courtiers overlooked their many flaws—and the fact that they had never produced a single magical artifact. The artistry and elaborate nature of the shadowrunners' deception was so great that a banquet was thrown in their honor.
- *As the King parades through town in his new "suit," naked as a babe, a child proclaims: "But he has nothing on!" and is shushed into silence.* This is where the mention of the Hanged Man tarot card first appears in the story, and it is thought that its reference has many meanings. During the farewell banquet for the two con artists, O'Connor gave a great speech where he announced that the shadowrunners had discovered a magical artifact—the Hanged Man tarot card. The card, which was never produced during the party, was mentioned not for the benefit of the shadowrunners, but for the courtiers who

allowed themselves to be deceived by a pair of charming outsiders. The mention of the card literally told the Court they had been fooled, and they can only see the extent of the lies that had been told if they looked at the situation from his perspective. It may also, however, point to another kind of admission, that Liam O'Connor is, in fact, a member of the Unseelie Court.

Unfortunately, the Hanged Man faction has developed such a terrible reputation that the romanticized views of turning the world upside down to see it in a new light are lost by those who have adapted and twisted its original intent. This, more so than the boring, political history of the faction, is what courtiers should be taught, because the Hanged Man holds many lessons for all.

REPRESENTATIVE(S)

At present, there are no reputable representatives of the Hanged Man faction willing to come forward. Recently, several prisoners who claimed to be associated with the Hanged Man faction were executed, and its members have fallen silent. Unfortunately, until the Hanged Man tarot card is found (for real this time), the future of this faction is a cloudy one, indeed.

Hermit

"I am not an outcast, nor do I shun the outside world. The Court simply does not serve my needs, and I am offended you would think otherwise."

Nickname(s): Ciallmhar, Unseelie (vulgar), Wizened, Candlemakers, Sociopath (vulgar), Iconoclast (vulgar)

Motto: I am an unlit Candle, Searching for my Spark.

Token (or Symbol): Chinese Lantern, Cave, Scrying Glass or Ball, Candlestick, Candelabra

Description: The Hermit is one of the most misunderstood factions, and yet it is also one of the most necessary. It is a faction of introspection, of courtiers who need to retreat from the hustle and bustle of regular Court activities, of Wild Fae who have yet to decide where their allegiances lie, and of every faerie who has ever been caught in the crossroads of indecision. Deemed the "leave us alone" faction, the Hermit exists as an anchor between all remaining factions but believes that the way forward—to the future of the Seelie Court—is to remain isolated from all other metaplanes. This, unfortunately, has caused some anxious fae to associate the Hermit with the Unseelie Court. In its negative aspect, the Hermit falls prey to the dark side of remaining alone and disconnected for far too long; members often warn of the angry curmudgeon disturbed by an intruder who dared to overstep their bounds, the fearful shapeshifter abandoned in the woods, or the paranoid courtier who is unable to decide what to do or say next.

Organization: Holacratic. The Hermit is filled with isolationists and diviners, soul-searchers and dreamers, schemers and loyalists. They tend to operate independently, even when working toward the same goal, and their roles are specialized depending upon their skill set.

Goals: To give courtiers a sanctuary and means of seeking refuge, when all other options for safety, security, and peace of mind are closed to them (public). To give the Wild Fae a temporary haven, free from the pressures of the Court, with the ability to partake in its bounty (public). To remain loyal to all native-born fae, regardless of crime or circumstance (public). To close the paths leading to other planes (secret). To force Lady Brane Deigh to prioritize Seelie Court business above all others (secret). To ensure no human enters the faerie metaplane ever again (secret).

Membership & Recruitment: The members of the Seelie Court often quip that the Hermit calls from a distance, and in many cases this is true. Unlike other factions, such as the Magician or the Higher Power, the Hermit is not overly active in the Court, and often does not participate in ceremonies or affairs of the state. Members tend to be found living outside of the Bristelùchairt, both metaphorically and literally, in order to pursue their goals in total secrecy. However, there are a rare few who do remain by the side of Lady Brane Deigh, and these members are there to ensure that the faction's political goals are achieved. Typically, courtiers and loyalists do not openly admit they are members of this faction. Other factions often paint the Hermit as being mentally unhinged or unbalanced, for solitude among modern faeries is not as prized as it should be.

HISTORY

The Hermit faction opens its arms to wanderers lost in the mist, and its ideology is inspired by a prayer to Danu for strength and support. This prayer, which originates from an oral tradition called the *Carmina Gadelica*, a text that has since been published many times combining the ancient traditions of Danu with Judeo-Christian beliefs. Oddly, this prayer pre-dates the Sixth World by a significant number of years, and courtiers assume their ancestors once bent a bloody knee on the battlefield, during the War of Sorrows, to ask for Danu's strength. This level of introspection and humility is at the heart of the Hermit faction, and its genuine need for solitude is best regarded when other courtiers understand they are not selfish—they are still humble and remain so before Danu, who they have never forgotten.

What members of the faction do not realize is that the prayer they take for granted speaks of their founder and the discoverer of the Hermit tarot card: a white-haired elf named Nuada the Dreamer who has long since laid down his sword to rest. To understand its members, then, is to know Nuada's story, and why this particular prayer is remembered in the hearts and minds of the Tuatha de Danaan in their darkest and most private moments of reflection.

Shield and Safeguard Us

Valiant Nuada of the white sword,
Who subdued the Firbolg of blood,
For love of the Tribe, for pains of Danu's children,
Hold thy shield over us, protect us all,
Hold thy shield over us, protect us all.

Danu beloved! Mother of the Shining Ones,
Shield, oh shield us, Lady of nobleness,
And Brigit the beauteous, shepherdess of the flocks,
Safeguard thou our animals, encircle us together,
Safeguard thou our animals, encircle us together.

And Ellen, beneficent, benign,
Governess of the trackways of power,
Invoke the star of power upon the path,
Guide well thou ourselves, shield our procession,

Guide well thou ourselves, shield our procession.
O Mother! O Maiden! O Crone of Wisdom!
Be the Triad with us day and night,
On the machair plain or on the mountain ridge,
Be the Triad with us and her cloak around us,
Be the Triad with us and her cloak around us.

— FROM THE *CARMINA GADELICA*

REPRESENTATIVE(S)

Nuada the Dreamer

Also known as: Nuada, Son of Danu, the Old Man by the Sea, Nuada the Beloved, Nuada the Ancient King

Nuada the Dreamer is both elf and legend. To all courtiers, Nuada the Dreamer represents the most mysterious member of the Hermit faction, for he does not wander in the fields of clover and honey, nor does he skim through parchments or listen to the Book of Memories like other self-proclaimed hermits do. He is neither awake nor asleep either, for he is caught in a permanent dream holding the the Hermit tarot card, his body frozen in crystal.

A relic of the Fourth World, Nuada is either descended from the first king of the Tuatha de Danaan or he actually is that immortal ruler and child of Danu. His royal lineage is not, however, the reason why he is connected to the Hermit faction; it is because he is accredited with ending the War of Sorrows.

Nuada's story, which emphasizes the power of introspection, eloquently demonstrates that a self-imposed isolation or exile does not carry negative weight. On the rarest of occasions, members of the Hermit faction might perform retellings of his story in Court when they feel it is most needed.

It begins at the tail end of the War of Sorrows during a snowy battle between the armies of the Tuatha de Danaan and the Wild Fae. The armies, which were commanded by Nuada, had laid down their swords and set camp for the night at the edge of a frozen river that bordered an immense forest, while the Wild Fae had taken refuge among the trees. Faced with the inevitability of loss and bloodshed, Nuada walked between the tents of his many soldiers, expecting to hear their fears and anxieties. Instead of being remorseful or filled with regret for attacking their wild brethren out of necessity, however, his armies bragged how they would stick a sword in the bellies of babes and slaughter young nymphs where they stood, as that was the only way to ensure that the Wild Fae never posed a threat to their "betters" again.

Horrified by what he had heard, Nuada's heart sank, for he considered the woodland faeries to be his people, too. The nymphs and satyrs and shapeshifters and little people may disagree with his leadership, but was he right to commit an act of genocide to protect his vanity? Was he, the First King, fairly placing blame on the Wild Fae for the losses of their kin?

His mind beset with questions he did not know the answers to, Nuada walked in solitude and, without realizing it, entered the forest alone in the dead of winter. Cold and without shelter, Nuada found a banyan tree and snuck inside its immense trunk to wait out the bitterness of the night until the dawn. And there, or so the story goes, the king of the Tuatha de Danaan had a terrible prophetic dream about the battle that was to come. In his vision, Nuada saw that the War of Sorrows could not stop until every drop of faerie blood was spilled upon the snow, and his armor-laden soldiers drowned in the freezing waters of the river, annihilating both sides of this terrible war.

The next morn, as pale sunlight streamed through the treetops and the snow began to fall, Nuada marched to the front lines and stood between the torch-wielding armies waiting for his command, with the Wild Fae rattling their sabers and their quarterstaffs. As the tension mounted, Nuada knew that if the horns of battle sounded, both sides would fall, so he did the one thing he feared the most: He commanded his armies lay down their arms, and he then left the battlefield.

In the Book of Memories, the story ends with both armies sitting down in the ice and the snow, crying. Nuada was never seen or heard from again, until his body was discovered just a few years ago encased in a cocoon of pink crystal, holding the Hermit card in his hand.

Members of the Hermit faction are convinced that Nuada had been found in the past, and it is his depiction painted on tarot cards featuring their namesake. They feel the rediscovery of his body is a warning that difficult times lie ahead, and the Seelie Court is in grave danger. As such, they treat Nuada as the true founder of their faction, and are convinced that he communicates with other members in their dreams. This has never been definitively proven, but most courtiers understand how powerful Nuada is, even as an iconic symbol for a faction that is often ostracized and greatly misunderstood.

Higher Power

"Surely you do not mean to pay me with a favor. What is your most valuable possession? I will take that instead."

Nickname(s): Conservatives, Bread-Takers (vulgar), Collectors, Bean-Counters (vulgar), Authoritarians, Greedy Smiths (vulgar)

Motto: Render unto me the things that are mine, and unto us the things that are ours.

Token (or Symbol): Dragon's hoard, cornucopia, Mana Diadem (magical artifact), wedding band

Description: The Higher Power represents the traditional form of measuring and achieving success, whether that be monetary or based in relationships. Their values are rooted in Sixth World ideals and archaic blessings such as the Rite of Choosing for arranged marriages, and the Ceremony of Unification to secure business partnerships or political allegiances. At its heart, the Higher Power values slow-moving, conservative methods to foster growth and prosperity and as such, the faction places a great deal of pressure on the role the Tuatha de Danaan play in the Court. Unfortunately, this means that the Higher Power tends to oversimplify the complexities of the Court, in favor of its core tenets and the founding families. Poverty, charity, weakness, and "going against the grain" are viewed negatively, and members who do not fall in line suffer the consequences of belonging to a faction that prizes certain traits above all others.

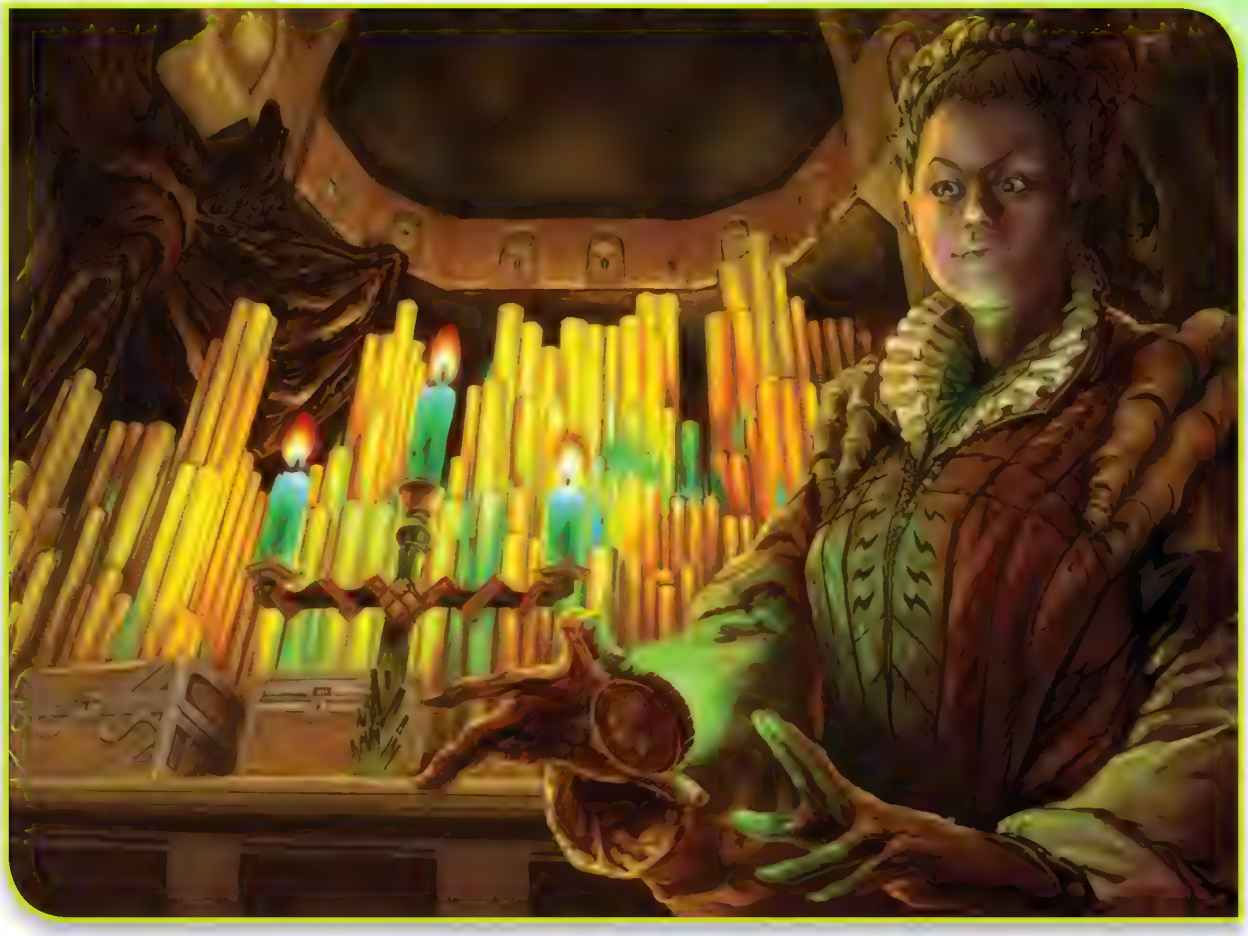
Organization: Hierarchical, based on the rank, lineage, and wealth of the members involved. The closer a member is to the sitting ruler, the higher up in the faction this courtier might be—after proof of wealth, of course. Unlike the other factions, the hierarchy is so stringent in terms of membership requirements that quarterly (or, as is the case with the Seelie Court, seasonal), in-depth reviews are conducted to reassess a member's net worth, strength of relationship, etc. to ensure that the individual is in the proper position according to their metrics. Ironically, faeries who inherit vast sums of wealth are given preferential treatment over the nouveau riche and tend to remain in power longer than those who take risks. As one might imagine, the shifting of positions is a big deal, as a demotion carries no shortage of negative side effects, while a promotion—even if it's temporary—offers many boons.

Goals: To fund initiatives that benefit the Seelie Court (public). To provide a source of income and investment that mirrors Sixth World banking institutions (public). To provide gifts, jobs, and loans to newly married fae couples to ensure they remain in the metaplane (public). To become the true power of the Seelie Court by obtaining enough wealth to approve or deny new and existing ventures (secret). To establish a penal system as a means of punishing debtors, con artists, and bad investors (secret).

Membership & Recruitment: Not much is known about the identity of the Higher Power faction's members, for matters are conducted in secrecy based on a tight set of qualifications that are unbeknownst to outsiders. Many courtiers assume that any traditionally wealthy faerie or socialite is likely a member, and they tread carefully. Court intrigue, however, points to several unflattering views of the faction. For example, courtiers whisper that the Higher Power operates for the sole benefit of the Tuatha de Danaan, is anti-human, tends to look down upon metahumans born from other planes, and is not afraid to oust members who make a bad investment or fall on hard times. As another, it is suspected that the Higher Power has an elf-only policy, which feels oppressive to many of the Wild Fae (dryads, gnomes, sylphs, etc.) who are convinced that they'll never "qualify" as influencers because they do not have the proper pedigree to accompany any wealth they might accumulate. Though this is likely a side effect rather than a rule, the faction has a tendency to be close-minded and, therefore, predictable if not oppressive. For those courtiers willing to pay attention, the Higher Power provides a valuable history lesson, for the manner in which they operate represents the Court at the height of its power.

HISTORY

On the surface, the Higher Power appears to be a faction filled with predictable, conservative ideals stemming from the considerable wealth and resources of many Sixth World societies. In truth, a prototype of the Higher Power faction has always existed, even before the acquisition of the tarot card on which it is based, albeit in a subtler manner. Its hierarchical



structure and clear values represent a society that honors material wealth and possessions over virtue and charity. Over time, certain idyllic philosophies have also become integrated into the ownership of money or, as is the case with the fae, favors and information. For example, the "haves," or the Tuatha de Danaan, deserve to rule because of their position and the considerable resources they bring to bear, while the remaining faeries, the "have nots," are expected to fall in line and be ruled by their betters.

To assume that the Higher Power faction is nothing more than a group of greedy, wealthy faeries, however, is to fall prey to stereotypes that the rich are lazy and manipulative, while the poor are virtuous and hard-working. Within the halls of the Seelie Court, any institutionalized assumptions that are commonly found on the earthly plane would spell disaster for any courtier, for the Tuatha de Danaan are as complex, if not more so, than magnates, entrepreneurs, and megacorporations. In part, courtiers should do well to remember that simple morality-based concepts, such as good and bad, are alien to the Seelie Court. The mythology of the fae is not rooted in any concept that money is the root of all evil, and they do not share the same motivations as others. Thus, this faction may seem otherworldly to its visitors, for the members of the Higher Power do not seek wealth simply for the sake of security; their eyes are turned to accumulation because they feel they are the best equipped to spend it on behalf of the Seelie Court as an entity. Or, in other words, the Higher Power's members believe that their efforts are best spent on fixing long-term problems rather than immediate needs, and this dichotomy is what leads to many stereotypes.

If this notion sounds like a religious ideology, as opposed to a business venture, it is because the Higher Power believe they are just and fair. A deep-seated sense of duty to help, protect, and better the True Fae with the expenditure and acquisition of resources is, however, a more recent philosophy that was secured by the acquisition of the Higher Power tarot card.

With a little prompting and a glass of strawberry clover ale, they'll gladly recount how the seeds of the

faction began to sprout upon the return of mana to their metaplane, for in a moment of curiosity, worry, and anxiety many faeries relied on divination for answers. And, in these moments, certain faeries began to acquire magical artifacts as their "lucky dragon's claw," as it were, tokens of power or security. The sitting members of the faction might be loathe to admit it, but Niall O'Connor was instrumental in the discovery of the Sixth World tarot as a magical artifact, and it was he who either purchased, created, or was given the Higher Power card. Upon his departure, O'Connor gave this card to one of his silent supporters, Zan Li, who used it to garner influence and support.

This, to the faction's current members, is what started the current version of the faction. If true, however, there are many nuanced perspectives that lead some faeries to believe that the Higher Power was actually the first faction, and Niall O'Connor is its true founder. Most courtiers feel more comfortable believing the Tuatha de Danaan are its members, for they do not want to think about the possibility that O'Connor is still an active member of the Seelie Court.

REPRESENTATIVE(S)

The members of the Higher Power do not have representatives like other factions do. Their agents belong to a secretive group of socialites known as "The Golden Shadow." This faction within a faction is outwardly facing, and its courtiers present a unified front to non-members, while discussing internal affairs behind closed doors. Additionally, the Golden Shadow is entrenched in puzzling traditions that shift regularly, which is confusing to courtiers who believe the faction's operations and memberships are largely static, and concerning to those who feel this is a sign the Higher Power faction is a lot more dangerous than they appear. Its rumored members, however, include Niall O'Connor but not Lady Brane Deigh. Since it is often assumed that O'Connor is connected to this faction in some fashion, courtiers have further proposed that:

- Zan Li returned the card to Niall O'Connor, who is keeping it by his side.
- The Tír politician had a fallout with the current members of the faction, and during his departure stole significant sums of money from the Tuatha de Danaan, and members are now bankrupt.
- The Higher Power faction is an attractive target for enemies of the Court, especially the Unseelie.
- The faction is not accumulating wealth, but magical artifacts, which puts them at odds with the Magician faction.
- The so-called hoard the Higher Power possesses is a gift from a secret donor, an as-yet-to-be-named dragon who is attempting to infiltrate the Court.

There may be some truth to the rumors that Niall O'Connor is actively connected to the Higher Power, while other jealous whispers may be borne from envy instead of fact. If O'Connor is, in fact, a member of this faction, other ranking courtiers have not openly discussed their feelings in Court for fear of Zan Li's considerable power and influence.

Magician

"Sure, we could open that door the old-fashioned way. But why bother? We can use mana for a reason, you know. You can, too."

Nickname(s): Mana Tappers (vulgar), Wizards, Students, Spellcasters, Silvertongues (vulgar).

Motto: To be, is to learn. To learn, is to teach. To teach, is to master.

Token (or Symbol): Moebius Strip. May be wrapped around a horn, crystal, bi-pointed pendant, or a sabre. In its negative aspect, the Moebius Strip is represented as a dragon. Occasionally, gender-based figures may also be part of the symbolism to represent studies in hermetic magic. Though their meanings vary wildly, the male often represents the Sun, the female the Moon, and the hermaphrodite the perfect union of the two.

Description: The Magician follows the Bastard in the Sixth World Tarot Deck, and this card is the symbol of the universal initiate or the perpetual student. The Magician is filled with immense possibilities and, while typically depicted as male, is an iconic representation of the pursuit of knowledge open to all. When inversed, its meaning reflects how an initiate has suffered from a lack of discipline or purpose, falling prey to psychological disorders, paranoid delusions, or mistakes that could have been prevented with proper care and training.

Organization: Hierarchical, and by subject. This faction, while founded upon the idea that anyone can learn how to use magic or diplomacy, is structured in layers upon layers of methodologies designed to train an unskilled initiate how to become a master in a discipline of their choice. For example, a creative individual with no formal training in the art of song will be taught how to read, play, perform, and teach music on a variety of instruments. Often, because of the time required to teach these skills, lessons will be conducted in the court with an appointed instructor. At any given time, however, a student may only study three subjects at a time, and these must be in different disciplines.

Goals: To retain the knowledge of faerie traditions by teaching them to others (public). To master the art of diplomacy and instruct courtiers how to negotiate with Sixth World citizens (public). To give Seelie Court members, regardless of background, the opportunity for an education (public). To unlock all known secrets of hermetic magic, and ensure that non-Seelie Court (and, for some, non-faction) members do not acquire such knowledge (secret). To promote faction members to the rank of master and then transport them to the earthly plane to use that knowledge to further the Seelie Court's agendas (secret). To find and become the ultimate master, versed in one skill pertaining to all known disciplines (secret).

Membership & Recruitment: The Magician faction prizes knowledge above all else, provided that information is put to good use. Unlike a rank-and-file courtier, members do not enjoy gossiping for the sake of gossiping. In fact, they despise rumormongering—unless it is used specifically as a tactic to handle problematic affairs of the state. Thus, while the faction might outwardly claim the entirety of the Seelie Court is welcome to join its ranks, in truth favors and munera are granted in order to recruit the most talented and intellectual initiates. In some ways, however, the Magician faction is entwined with the historic methods for how knowledge is passed from one faerie to another, for wherever there are artisans and diplomats, spellcasters and musicians, silversmiths and scribes there will be a need to teach and preserve the traditions of the fae. For this reason, however, all initiates must declare five areas of study during the Rite of Wishes and, as soon as they are welcomed into the faction, they will be assessed and then assigned mentors based on their preferences. As a result of this mandate, openly pledged members are fewer than outsiders might expect, as the fae do not want to spend their long years mastering an art they had no interest in doing.

Many Hues, Untold Meanings

After guests are presented before the Court for the first time, they are often asked for their first impressions of the Seelie. In almost every case, visitors remark how colorful, elaborate, and festive the decorations are, not knowing that every petal, gemstone, and arrangement was carefully planned to produce a series of hidden messages. The colors of the Court shift with the seasons and its politics, and often newcomers make the mistake of believing that certain hues, specifically black and white, have static meanings. To assume that anything in the Court is permanent would be to the guest's detriment, for all colors, shades, and hues have variable meaning. For example, the many shades of black can represent the deepest mysteries of mana, oceanic depths, rich soil, dark intents or passions, all the colors of the rainbow combined, the fabled dark [illegible], or the embodiment of pure evil. White, on the other hand, might translate to purity, death, [illegible], cleanliness or holiness, youth, [illegible], parchment, natural foods [illegible], milk, [illegible], coconuts), or poisonous [illegible].

HISTORY

The Tuatha de Danaan have long tinkered with the idea that their time could be better spent learning various fields of study. Younger faeries and less-experienced courtiers have always had the benefit of a tutor or a sponsor who could teach them the secret language of fans, flower arrangements, and gestures, but outside of Court intrigue and diplomacy, there has never been a formal method of instruction for other types of disciplines such as music, healing, linguistics and, of course, mana usage and conservation. As the general mood of the Court became more and more anxious with the passage of time, however, many highly skilled courtiers began to

pull their protégés aside to teach them what they knew, in the hopes that the gift of knowledge would help them to weather changes.

One such individual was one of the Queen's former handmaidens, Chloe Glowworm, a young savant who accidentally discovered the Magician card from the Sixth World Tarot deck. Chloe hailed from a reputable family of nymphs who tended to the trees of the Court and was born and raised among her fellow courtiers. After the arrival of a representative from the Azteca Corporation, however, Chloe was enamored by the young man's stories and realized that she had yet to explore the lush, wild forests and fields just outside her home.

Chloe, however, had many admirers who often clamored for her attention. One such courtier was a quick-tempered elf by the name of Sven Skarsbard. Those who knew Chloe believe that Sven was jealous of the guest's interest in her, and it was for this reason that he promised to take her on a tour of the Wild Fae's domains with a small party of naturalists. The group wandered into a nearby forest to search for medicinal herbs and began plucking several sprigs of what they believed to be hollylock, a flowering herb native to the faerie's metaplane that temporarily boosts a user's mana. Unfortunately, the party misidentified the plant and had accidentally picked a deadly flower called Midnight's Mare instead. Sven, in his desire to impress Chloe, ingested the petals and fell to the ground in a coma. Shocked into action, Chloe performed a spell to wither all of the plants within a short radius, and in her moment of grief and anger killed a nearby oak tree that had stood for centuries. As its leaves dried out and fell to the ground, Chloe caught a glimpse of a bejeweled box that had been stashed high up in its branches. Upon retrieving the treasure, Chloe discovered the magical artifact and decided to use it as leverage to save Sven's ife.

The petition of Chloe Glowworm to restore the good health of Sven Skarsbard is recorded in the Book of Memories. Wearing naught but a simple, unadorned shift, Chloe stood before the entire Court in supplication and made an impassioned speech about the need to

establish schools and universities. After her query, she then presented the Magician tarot card, and told Lady Brane Deigh that she could have it—provided she successfully saved Sven's life. Unbowed, for she would not be bribed or manipulated in such a harsh manner, the Lady gently expressed her deep regret at the loss of her courtier and made the grandest of gestures by decreeing that any courtier, regardless of rank, may compete for the right to earn that prize, provided they heed Chloe's request to set up a means by which faeries could study and learn.

That night, while Sven Skarsbard battled for his life, nervous courtiers consulted with the wizened healers to concoct a solution for this and many other problems, a cure that would heal any wound. Many of these potions, which have since been brewed many times, were found to have a variety of temporary effects ranging from enhancing one's appearance to temporarily separating one's soul from one's body. Only one potion, however, was discovered to have any positive impact on Sven's health. This concoction is called by the simplest of names: The Elixir of Subtraction. Upon ingesting it, the potion erases any trace of the last food (or drink) the patient ate from their system. Though the Elixir of Subtraction didn't completely heal Sven, he showed significant signs of improvement and, eventually, was able to make a full recovery.

As promised, the Magician tarot card was given to the potion's inventor. The Elixir of Subtraction was studied as a spell formula for use in enchantment, and it has been brewed by then-Steward Secundus Gabriella di Rosario. The Court loyalist—much to the surprise of everyone else—not only fulfilled Chloe's request, but took her idea a step further and formed a faction around it. Gabriella's unexpressed political views have since been vaulted into the spotlight, for she and her daughters carry on an ancient magical tradition that other courtiers thought was extinct.

On the surface, it appears that the Magician faction is in capable hands. Scratch a little deeper, however, and Gabriella appears to be more ambitious than she dares to reveal, for this member has a dark secret that, if exposed, would threaten the stability of the Court.

REPRESENTATIVE(S)

Gabriella, Lucinda, and Allegra di Rosario

While honored masters and mana-users can be tasked to represent the faction's many interests, Gabriella di Rosario and her daughters, Lucinda and Allegra, are the faces of the Magician faction that all courtiers recognize. Interestingly, Gabriella is and never has been a courtier, as her family is not related to the Tuatha de Danaan or any faerie present at Court. The story of her rise to power is well-known, but the accounting of her years at Court is unknown and often ignored. Viewed as soft-spoken and shy, Gabriella managed to avoid the spotlight in her position as Steward Secundus. Trained in all the arts of diplomacy and managing the Court's mundane affairs, such as the placement of banquet tables and the order of a processional, Gabriella served in the shadow of the Steward, and stepped in only when he was preoccupied, sick, or traveling. And so, many courtiers forgot that Gabriella even existed, for she kept her opinions to herself and often kept to the shadows. If any courtier had managed to scrutinize her just a little bit closer, they would have noticed the following oddities:

- Gabriella's ears were *round*, not pointed.
- She never ate or drank in the Seelie Court.
- Gabriella did not sleep with her eyes open, and her place of rest was unknown.
- Her daughters were both delivered in total privacy, and it is unclear who her midwife was.
- Her face aged more quickly than that of the other elves.

Shockingly, Gabriella di Rosario, the head of the Magician faction, is, in fact, a *human* who has managed to pass as an elf for months, if not years. But, like many con artists skilled in the arts of deception, Gabriella is a master manipulator who knows how and when to hide the truth of her identity. She might be an adept or a technomancer or a shaman—and no one, not even Lady Brane Deigh herself, would suspect this is the case until her deception unravels.

Cornering Gabriella is much harder now that she has risen to the heights of power, for the human has an unhealthy fascination with the magical arts, and she spends every waking moment unlocking the secrets of mana in order to protect herself. A skilled potions master, Gabriella can brew illusions in a bottle or poisons so dangerous they eat through glass. Her daughters, on the other hand, are fully elvish and only slightly resemble their mother. This, unfortunately for Gabriella, has not gone unnoticed by the rest of the Court, and those fixated on personal appearances note that with the passing of time, her daughters look less and less like her every day.

It is probable that Gabriella is prepared to face the Court in a trial, but unlikely. As she continues to draw in more knowledge, her behavior is becoming increasingly strange and erratic. Whatever ritual or rare bit of magic she's searching for may eventually lead to her downfall, for time is not on this human's side.

Unseelie

"We do not live in the shadows. We are the shadows, and we will cover this Court in darkness—just as we have before."

Nickname(s): Unmakers (vulgar), Unclean (vulgar), the Darkness, the Fallen

Motto: Unknown

Token (or Symbol): Unknown. However, some courtiers have created symbols to protect themselves from the Unseelie, and these representations are typically of dark, hooded figures covered or obscured by flowers.

Description: The Unseelie Court actively works against the Seelie Court, and seeks to subvert its power by ensuring the Prophecy of the Unmaker is brought to life. The Court itself is shrouded in mysteries and enigmas, for no one has been able to prove its existence. For some, the Unseelie Court is the bogeyman hiding in Lady Brane Deigh's boudoir, ready to strike at any moment from the shadows.

Organization: Unknown. It is suspected, however, that the Unseelie is a study in opposites that has been carefully constructed as perfect, albeit dark, reflection of the Seelie Court. If this is true, however, the Unseelie Court is acting as a counterbalance and could lay claim to many recent disasters. While some courtiers have a tendency to exaggerate, especially when telling stories, part of what makes the Unseelie Court so frightening is that its members do not seek the spotlight, so it's difficult to tell if a deal gone wrong or a kidnapping was their doing or not.

Goals: Every goal the Unseelie Court has is carried out in total secrecy. The Prophecy of the Unmaker, which was discovered centuries ago, is the only clue that their members are committed to destroying the Seelie Court.

Membership & Recruitment: If the Unseelie are actively recruiting members, then they are doing so outside of the confines of the Court. The Seelie have eyes and ears everywhere, and many magical artifacts are placed at key positions around the Court—unbeknownst to most courtiers—to eavesdrop on conversations. At least two of these artifacts were designed to alert security should certain words be uttered as well. Unfortunately, this means that many Court loyalists are convinced the Unseelie Court is currently being championed by the Wild Fae or the slumbering faeries, neither of which is directly tied to the Seelie Court. This fear has generated many discussions about waking up sleeping faeries or bringing the Wild Fae to heel, but as the number of factions increases in the Court, the tension mounts, and everyone—from the sitting ruler to the footman—waits for the Unseelie to make their move.

HISTORY

The history of the Unseelie Court is uneven and biased, for its existence is predicated on a fundamental belief that many courtiers do not share and cannot remember. The Prophecy of the Unmaker, which is a scroll filled with ten thousand prophetic visions written toward the ending of the Fourth World, has a few key passages that describe the Unseelie Court and its role in what's to come:

For in the shadows call
When wanderers will fall,
The Age of Reason dawns,
And mortals will not fawn,
O'er nymphs that dry,
And tricksters that cry.
In these, the shadows tell,
The Unseelie Court fares well.

Some historians posture that the preceding passage is concerned with the rise of the Unseelie Court during the Fifth World, and that its ability to function depends upon the *absence* of mana. Or, in other words, the Seelie Court has already transformed into the Unseelie Court during the First, Third, and Fifth Worlds, and will again in the Seventh, because it is part of a natural cycle. Others, however, think that the Unseelie are not at all organized; they are simply criminally minded opportunists who took advantage of the fundamental structural changes that occurred on the faerie metaplane during the Fifth World. A few members of the Dragon faction in particular dare to make speculations, which others find foolhardy. Emissaries have preached that all courtiers are making a grave mistake if they are stupid enough to buy the idea that the Unseelie Court is filled with faeries, for it's *possible* that the Unseelie are not faeries at all, but jealous humans who cannot use mana.

One of the ruling families, namely the Dál gCais clan, tell a different tale, in part due to the following darkly humorous passage:

The bell will toll in evenin' hours,
And reapers'll strike the blooming flowers,
To hill and dale and forest glen,
The time won't keep the nearest when,
For in the air thar'll be a shimmer,
And Kings and Queens won't catch a glimmer,
Of trees in twain, and faeries, too,
Of Courts and fools sittin' in the loo.

The Dál gCais recognize and acknowledge the humorous tone of this passage, and interpret the writer (or writers) as being sarcastic—with good reason. They posture that, like Circe or Nostradamus, the prophets of old may have tried to warn the Seelie Court's sitting rulers of the catastrophe that was to come and were ignored. Here, the Tuatha de Danaan feel that the prophecy speaks to a unique celestial event, that the faerie's metaplane has either been torn apart or duplicated, and its existence formed a near-identical realm on another plane, locking them together in a near-symbiotic interplanar relationship. If that's the case, then the Unseelie Court operate in an alternate reality, and their desire to "unmake" the Seelie Court is because they're not only aware of this fact, their so-called "parent plane" that birthed them may eventually destroy them.

Of course, Occam's Razor tells us that the simplest explanation is usually the right one. Therefore, consider the following pieces of evidence:

- The Unseelie Court's existence is present in many poems, lyrics, and Seelie Court documents.
- Members of the Unseelie Court have never been exposed, while suspects have been brought before the Seelie Court and tried many times over.
- The Unseelie Court has never taken credit for the many misfortunes and disasters that have plagued the Seelie Court and its ruling families since it was first mentioned in the court record.

Combined, these three facts paint a damning picture that leads to a new theory: that it is also possible that the Unseelie Court is a total fabrication concocted by the kings and queens of centuries past. Why would the Seelie Court invent its own enemy? There are many political reasons for doing so, and the biggest reason is to interrogate their subjects and keep a close watch. If this is true, then the Tuatha de Danaan is responsible for creating a threat that has since taken on a life of its own.

PROPHECY OF THE UNMAKER

The prophecy, which is considered to be a Fifth World relic, is the only document that has not been replicated or memorized. Deemed "dangerous" at the best of times, the Prophecy of the Unmaker is a threat to the Seelie Court, because its passages definitively prove that the Unseelie Court is real. Unlike any other recorded document in the history of the Tuatha de Danaan and the metaplane, the Prophecy of the Unmaker is not a magical artifact or, if it was, it has long since lost its power, rendering its delicate, rose-petal-thin pages so fragile they need to be magically preserved or else they'll crumble.

Sixth World experts have recently been given passages from the Prophecy of the Unmaker that have been deemed "safe" by faerie historians, in an effort to collaborate with scholars from other planes. This theory has spurred any number of implications that the Unseelie Court is involved in this initiative, for many courtiers do not understand why outsiders would be handed a priceless part of their history for no good reason other than "to build camaraderie and kinship." Some think the Prophecy of the Unmaker is fake, that it was written by a human, or that it is not the only scroll of its kind.

Unfortunately, because it is too fragile to be dated by any modern means, the inability to verify its age has led many members of the Eclipse faction, in particular, to propose that the prophecy's prolific author and visionary penned several other foretellings that dealt with other events that happened on alternate planes of existence. If there's even a shred of truth to these rumors, then the Tuatha de Danaan are sharing information in the hopes that the Sixth World archives are comprehensive and include Fourth- and Fifth-World prophets, such as Nostradamus, and prophetesses, like the long storied tradition of the African Sybils, or the more recent figures like the occultist Helena Blavatsky or the so-called "sleeping prophet," Edgar Cayce.

WHISPERS & SCANDALS

Mention the Unseelie Court by name and every listener might have a different reaction. Some courtiers do not believe they exist, while others regard them as just another of the Court's tricksters, ready to play pranks—just like the more mischievous members of the Hanged Man faction—eager to unseat the static, tepid ways of the Seelie Court. With the rise of the factions, however, most courtiers find there is some truth to the idea that the Unseelie Court exists and this, in part, is because of factions that are either sympathetic or aligned with their purported goals, such as the Death, Hermit, and occasionally, Comet factions. After all, the courtiers know, firsthand, how challenging it is to organize a faction and ensure its members remain on task and focused on its common goals. Despite this, the current climate in the Seelie Court is to believe that the Unseelie Court is real, and this faction is actively recruiting members, too. Here are some of the more popular and sensational scandals concerning the Unseelie Court that have swept the halls recently:

- The Death faction is, in fact, the Unseelie Court, and members are concentrating on the Prophecy of the Unmaker to decipher its cryptic meanings. Thus far, the Death faction's representatives have yet to deny these allegations, and the longer they wait to respond, the greater the risk they'll incur a formal investigation. Some courtiers suspect that the Death faction is baiting the Court and is scheming to undo decades of protocols in order to reshape them to their liking.
- Lady Brane Deigh is the sitting ruler of the Unseelie Court, and she is responsible for maintaining a

balance between both Courts to keep them from destroying each other. Standing on the edge of a precipice, the Lady travels to a special astral plane in her sleep. In this undisclosed and inaccessible location, her predecessor, Liam O'Connor, stashed away the members of the Unseelie Court his dominion discovered, so that they might live out their long years in peace. His problem, however, has become her problem, and she has chosen to deal with her enemy by giving them mercy they do not deserve.

- The Evo Corporation is genetically engineering clones that will act as body doubles of less-popular courtiers, and these doppelgangers will undermine the Seelie Court from within. It should be noted that this, in particular, is likely a grand hoax designed to force courtiers to second-guess how they feel about the Sixth World megacorporations. Since doppelgangers now exist in the metaplane, courtiers wildly speculate how they might infiltrate the Seelie Court and harm their reputation or frame them for a crime they didn't commit—like the changeling myths told to scare human parents into nurturing and raising their babies properly. Still, this fear combines two credible threats, for Evo would sacrifice several employees if it had the ability to kidnap any members of the Seelie Court to experiment upon them.
- The Dragon faction is recruiting humans to sabotage the Tír nations at strategic, high-value targets such as local power plants, Matrix server rooms, etc. If successful, the members of the Dragon faction will take steps to convince like-minded factions that the Unseelie Court was responsible for the act of terrorism, and will petition the Seelie Court to reinstate the Rites of Testimony, which would force every courtier to bare their secrets publicly.
- An unnamed aggressor is breaking into the sealed crypts containing the slumbering fae, and that assailant is either kidnapping or murdering them where they sleep. Courtiers think this is the work of shadowrunners who have recently come under fire for attempting to steal several jars of rose-based cosmetics. Others wonder if the missing faeries have been forcibly taken by the Unseelie and are being brainwashed to do their bidding, or if they are, in fact, the missing Unseelie Court members who are just now waking up.

Members of all factions, and to a greater extent, the entirety of the Seelie Court, understand that there will always be rumors circulating about the Unseelie Court and its mysterious operatives. The fear that this Court exists constantly fuels speculation and keeps courtiers occupied, seeking shadows, dust, and ash where there's none to be found. With the debut of the factions, however, the tone of the courtiers' anxiety has shifted, because now they can and do picture Unseelie Court activists working, negotiating, and mingling alongside them.

It remains to be seen how, when, and why the Unseelie Court will finally make its debut after the dawning of the Sixth World. One thing is clear, however, to all who have heard of it—it's unlikely the Tuatha de Danaan will be prepared for what will happen when they arrive, for they are too busy concerning themselves with everything but the Unseelie Court.

The Court Itself

by Tivta Farspoken

Let me start by saying that I am not happy to be doing this tour of the building that houses the Court—the Bristelùchairt. Those of more authority than I, as a means to make me understand my place, have placed this impossible responsibility upon me in order to benefit those now visiting our home without invitation.

I have to start by saying that a guide to the Court itself is an impossible task. The very nature of the structures within which we hold court are mercurial on the best of days, labyrinthine on most, and vindictively transient when the mood strikes. This place has existed for millennia, and within the memories of its oldest inhabitants there is not a single day in which the Court did not change of its own volition.

That stated, let me offer what I can in this fool's errand by providing you a general overview of what I'll discuss and describe. There is a stability within the Court created by presence. The areas of the Court in which official business is conducted will open my tour, as these are some of the most consistent sites. They still change, but from day to day they are generally recognizable and able to be located. The residences and visitors' quarters will follow, though the lack of consistent and constant occupancy creates many unpredictable situations. Beyond that, things stay in a perpetual flux. I'll speak on the common areas, where all are allowed, and end with as painstaking a collection as I can manage on the rest, including some places that only exist with the phases of some moon or another, the seasons, or the whims of the unknown forces that built this place in a time beyond memory.

Court

Let's begin with those grand places where official business occurs. All told, there are more than I can list but despite the rigor of the task which I was assigned, I was given no additional access beyond what I was already allowed. Though if I am not allowed, those listening here aren't likely to gain access to these spots either.

No visit to the Seelie Court ever avoids **The Great Hall**, called the Calling Hall by those whose voices are not dignified enough to be heard there but whose authority or piteous nature still allows them to call upon the powers of the Court to hear their pleas at a time they deem necessary.

Entry to the Great Hall is the same for all. From Queen to outsider, everyone enters the chamber through the Dawnseeker's Arch. A pair of figures, intricately carved from the white marble, adorn the arch, each reaching out and holding the heavy oak doors in place. On the right is Evilynn, also known as the Rose Guardian, Thorny Witch, or Lady of the Garden. She stands in a bed of roses that bloom with real buds, frequently picked by the first to Court each day but only when in full bloom. The tales of those who plucked an unopened bud are full of woe. Rising from the bed of roses are thorny vine-covered legs. Words are perceived and translated by each mind in a different way, so that last sentence needs clarification. The legs of the Rose Guardian are covered in vines, but whether the thorns project from the vines or the flesh is often a point of contention and perception. I feel I have seen both, and many claim what you see depends on who you are. Anyway, the legs of the statue meet the billowing dress, and yes, it does move, albeit slowly. Sometimes spirits stand before the doorway and stare,

claiming their sense of time is mutable, and the flow of the dress a thing of wondrous beauty to those that can behold it. Evilynn's dress is plain, in contrast to her counterpart, though the vines and thorns seem to hide beneath the surface to erupt at her neck and arms. Her arm extends and bends back as her hand clutches the arch of the door, fingers intertwined with the gauntleted digits of her eternal mate. The vines from her collar slip into her hair and ring her face. Long slender elven ears slip from the tangle of hair and vine, a point used by many within the Dragon faction to claim creation of the arch. The face of this beauty swings with the opening of the door, eyes always locked upon the figure across the arch.

On the left is Caliphost, also called the Iron Guardian, War's Host, or the Shackled Soldier. Before I continue let me clarify that I do mean right and left and that stays the same regardless of which side of the door you stand. The two columns of the arch are split forms of their chosen subjects. Starting again at the feet, we see Caliphost standing among the flaming bones of the fallen, in particular, a skull many call The Truthspeaker for its occasional speech to those who pass. Sharp-angled armor-clad legs rise to meet his rose-sigilled breastplate. Armored arms extend out and bend up to clasp the top of the door, where we see the delicate fingers of Evilynn between the gauntleted digits of Caliphost. The head of Caliphost bears his closed helm or his exposed face, depending on the whims of the arch. His features are definitely elven; though his ears are never visible, the classic almond eyes, sharp nose, and high cheekbones are unmistakable. When visible, those eyes are locked with Evilynn's across the doorway. The helm bears a rose upon the face plate and a rising branch at the ear, which will occasionally bear leaves or small berries. The berries are not to be eaten. They are bitter and said to be poisonous. The arch above the figures bears branches over Caliphost and vines over Evilynn, which meet at a blazing sun at the peak. This sun changes little, though during eclipses on the material plane, the figure will change with the event. This is a time in which a certain faction always crowds the hall to observe or ask requests while they feel they are favored. Other faction members spend that time plotting to foil the plans of the Eclipse.

Though grand and impressive, that's enough about the doorway. Upon entry, the Great Hall is dominated by a single large oak tree at its center that rises to the ceiling, if there is one. It has never been seen. The branches and leaves cover the heights; below them, glowing fruits provide light and the occasional snack for those visitors who find themselves in the lower branches. The fruits are said to taste like the season—tart in the spring, sweet in summer, dry and sharp in autumn, and bitter in the winter. The flavors benefit the hall, as they keep the fruits from being eaten during the seasons where the skywalls grow dimmer. The skywalls are what they call the walls below the canopy line that shine with the season, a rich deep blue in the spring, bright blue come summer, a crisp purple with autumn, and midnight black in the winter. Below the sky, but above the calling floor, is the gallery. The gallery encircles the room at varying heights and is where the Court nobility, their guests, and esteemed visitors gather when in session. The greatest height is opposite the Dawnseeker's Arch, and that is where the Lady Brane Deigh positions herself. The remaining ring rises and falls with no pattern. Court truly begins when the attendants arrive and begin to claim gallery locations for their master's entourage. This often results in quite the scene and is frequently more entertaining than the actual procedures of the Court.

The gallery itself varies in depth, creating another dimension to fight with each day. Some sections are large enough for a few dozen, while others barely allow space to pass. Levitation or flight be helpful in reaching the gallery, as there are no stairs. Rope ladders can be used in a pinch. Some have climbed, whether out of necessity due to lack of arcane skill or assistance, desire if they wished to make a statement, or ignorance for those who know no better. Their reasoning is often a topic at mid-day gatherings.

The edge of the gallery is ringed with a short railing. This small barrier is often thought of as a reminder by Court officials of where the beings of the Court sit, as the entire rail is made by roots of the great oak growing up the walls. They create another source of seating contention within the gallery, as points where the roots grow up draw attention, while the gaps get less. Between the roots, the walls below the gallery are filled with murals depicting events from war to love-making, bearing images from all ages of memory and metaplanes of existence. They provide yet another reason to fight for a certain spot.

The final element to describe is the floor, which is a mosaic of tiles that shifts frequently, often while Court is in session. The patterns can be random, create an image, or even seem random but create an image only for those who can see outside the normal spectrum of light, both into the range of heat or magic.

Not every conversation can occur in front of the masses, and that's why there is a second hall for official Court dealings that is solely for speaking with the Queen, her Steward, her Advisor, or her Champion, though the latter three are spoken with significantly less frequently than the Queen. This place is called **The Queen's Hall**. Used by the Queen and her regal retinue for meetings when the Great Hall is busy with the dealings of the lesser folks, it is also a place for less-public meetings, though all meetings here are recorded in the Court archives. Most of the time.

The Queen's Hall pays homage to no one but the queen. After standing outside an immense overlapping double door bearing a hyacinth, the symbol of the Lady Brane Deigh, one enters a narrow arched corridor filled with images of the Queen gifted to her by some of the greatest artists in history. All the histories. You would recognize names like Picasso and DaVinci, though he is not the man you think he is. There is limited space and the Queen selects her favorites. The longest hanging piece is currently The Esiel Queen, a piece painted by Ailusrianiel, a native of the Metaplane of Air. It is done entirely in tiny shards of blue crystallized esiel—I believe they call it true air on the material plane—in varying shades. Beyond the corridor of the queen, as the entrance is called, is the hall itself, a structure marveled at by all those who come to speak with the queen or her coterie.

If you seek to speak in an official capacity to a member of the Court outside the Great Hall, and it's not the Queen or her closest fellows, you will want to know about The Hall of Whispers. It is called that because all conversations held here are narrowed between specific participants. The magics that allow this privacy leave only a slight auditory hum, but the hall of hums just didn't have the same appeal to it. The name is also apropos to the activities that occur within, for even there, where all talk goes to records, some will whisper as if they pass secrets. Some speak of a secret language known only by or among certain factions that is used to communicate within the confines, but outside the purview of the Court.

I diverge. My apologies.

The Hall of Whispers is entered through an iris doorway, one of those that opens out from the center in thin slivers. The slivers here are made of a silver metal with opalescent properties. Nothing ornate or fancy but quite interesting in its own right. With a name so suggestively secretive, one would expect a room of dark corners and hidden conversations, but this is still a public venue of the Seelie Court. Instead, the chamber is a massive dome with trigonometrically serrated walls that are part of the room's arcane properties. And while the name implies dark deeds, the walls are a colorful rainbow over each bit of the 180-degree arc. Each degree creates a link with its opposing point. These lines are what create the whisper links that allow conversations to occur in private while standing right next to another courtier. Those in a conversation need to be aligned when their communication begins but may move freely around the room and still keep the link. Those who see the mana of the place can spot a glow of the specific color linked to each participant.

Spies will often add themselves to the conversations of others but must be sure to both remain silent and mask their aura to hide the link they have stolen. It is possible to engage in multiple conversations at once, but there is no way to limit the participants that can hear you without breaking the connection.

The colors upon the walls are sharply contrasted by the black marble floor.

Whispering Words

The use of the Whispering Hall as a public and yet secret meeting place is nothing new—in fact, the systems for communications within this place are older than memory but closely protected by each faction. Only the highest and most trustworthy members are taught how to use each faction's dialect of Whispering Words, the name for this language that combines words, gestures, body positions, and facial expressions in order to communicate something other than what is actually said by the words themselves. The use of non-verbal cues also keeps the conversation off official records without the [illegible] of a private meeting. Every faction has [illegible] and the fact that some [illegible] and gestures are shared [illegible] it all originated with a common language [illegible] a time before the divide of the factions.

There are a few underground [illegible] the languages, but anyone [illegible] knows their code without [illegible] will quickly find themselves [illegible]

As it is my task to be thorough, I will mention a few important aspects about these areas that dwell in the realm of uncertainty and two-faced rumor. The certain uncertainty refers to the size of every gallery and hall in this castle. They change frequently, and rarely do these changes match a current need or requirement. More often they lead to a problem rather than a benefit. On the busiest of days, these chambers are often at their smallest, pushing tensions and political patience to their limits. The two-faced rumor flows around Lady Brane Deigh with claims and arguments about whether she, can or cannot control these factors within the castle. Some claim she controls it directly, others propose it is caused by her mood and that the Queen has a special link to the Bristelùchairt. It's curious either way.

Quarters

My station is not high enough to visit all parts of the **Queen's Chambers**, but I was allowed to visit and take a few notes whilst she was at Court. I also asked a few pointed and specific questions of her servants to try to add to this treatise on Bristelùchairt geography but got very few straight answers.

As usual, first the doorway. Well, actually first outside the doorway. To the left and right of the Queen's Chambers door—the main one, at least, because there are rumors of many more—stand a total of six stone statues (two in black, two in grey, and two in white). They look masterfully carved and life-like. Which they should because they are alive. Or at least animate. The statues are the guardians of her chambers. They stand a constant vigil outside the main doors. Those who wish to do the Queen harm who come by her chambers, whether she is present or not, are attacked by the guardians as they sense the deepest intentions of those who come before them. The door that they guard is a pointed arch double door with crystal rings to pull it open. The rings are rumored to be spell anchors that soften a visitor's mood or will before entering. The wood of the doors is thick oak with a bouquet of red roses on each door as the only decoration.

Beyond these doors is the Queen's sitting room. The sitting room has three hearths, six doors (seven if you count the entrance), and several varying arrangements of furniture depending on the number of guests being hosted or the current whims of the room. Servants work to keep the room looking properly full but not overstuffed. Each hearth bears a painting intended to affect visitors. Whether it's a scene of carnage and war to deter conflict, a painting of a familiar place in the visitor's home, or a myriad of other options, they are a tool used in the Queen's strategy of psychology.

For ease of description, I will number the doors clockwise, starting with the entry as number one. Doors three and six are crafted from a black wood and lead to hallways that I was not allowed to traverse. I was told they both lead to the Queen's private rooms but a different door must be taken on each day, determined by a spell that only the Queen knows. Door two, formed from a single block of mahogany, leads to a private sitting room decorated in deep purples with gold accents and rich mahogany furniture. The space and seating allows no more than a handful or two of guests and is usually reserved for meetings with small groups. Door seven, a pale ashwood, leads to a lavatory chamber where guests can wash up or use the facilities when attending long meetings. Doors four and five, each made from stonewood, a material native to the Metaplane of Earth, lead to a dining chamber and trophy room, respectively. The dining chamber is where the Queen hosts the Queen's Banquet,and it can seat about forty. The corners of the dining room have small serving tables, each wall has a hearth, and two doors lead out. One to the kitchens, the other to the private areas of the Queen's chambers. The trophy room is the same size as the dining room, but the table is replaced with five glass cases on pedestals. Within those and the ten tall cases along the walls, Lady Brane Deigh shows the trophies of her reign. In recent years she has added the cards bequeathed her by Dunkelzahn and small vial of an opalescent gel that many claim is full of virus-bearing miniature machines from the material plane. Prior acquisitions include the Flute of Fasteiger, the royal scepter of King Dolsus, Abejektros' eyes, and hundreds of other unique items. Some hold arcane power, others are symbols of her successes, and the rare few are reminders of mistakes not to be forgotten. This room has no doors but at least two of the wall cases are "secret" passages. What is beyond, I am not privy to, but I have it on repeated rumor that at least one houses another small contingent of stone guardians to protect the room's treasures.

While I was not allowed full access to all of the Queen's Chambers I was allowed to explore a currently unoccupied residence among the **Lords' Manors**, which are all located within the same wing of Bristelùchairt. Ranked individuals at Court are offered a chance, based

on their status, to purchase a manor within the castle for a fee I am not privy to at this time. The manors are as identical as anything within Bristelùchairt ever is, and their positions around the wing shift constantly. One evening a lord may go home to his manor at the first floor and the next morning find himself exiting at the highest floor and most distant hall.

What one should expect if they ever earn a visit, a manor home includes an entry foyer, a dining chamber, a library sitting room, a private office, kitchen, a larder, two servant's chambers, four privies, four minor bedrooms that are often converted to servant quarters or offices if their family is small, and a master bedroom with a small private office and large wardrobe.

The count of rooms rarely changes, but the configuration can be controlled via a small set of blocks. The blocks are given to the owner; each block represents a room. The blocks can be rearranged to shift the location of the rooms, as long as all are built off the entry foyer. Most owners keep the blocks locked up in their manor once they have set their floor plan, but some keep the blocks on them in order to be able to arrange their home to best suit their needs when they arrive back or to increase their security. It is possible to keep moving rooms or separate them entirely while they are occupied to trap unwelcome visitors or gain a little extra privacy.

The decor and style of each manor reflects the preferences of its owner. I can say Lord Aestrian prefers to decorate with elemental air-infused furniture from his home plane that ignores standard rules of gravity and positioning. That way he and his fellow natives can sit wherever they please. In stark contrast, Lord Blackbane has a rentable, modern-looking manor, with objects from and resembling those of the material plane.

I feel it my duty to mention that the number of Lords' Manors is not known and rumored to be not finite. They add and stack and pull others from the vast storage when needed. Also of import is the three members of court who gain and do not need to pay for their manors. The Champion, Advisor, and Executioner are all given a manor with their position. The Executioner's manor is rarely used due to the flux of the position in recent decades, but its existence allows the person currently occupying the position a place to hold private meetings or house guests beneficial to escaping their station.

As public places go, the **Servant's Wing** is kind of the bottom of the social ladder in terms of places to visit but it sits at the top of the list of places to get solid information from people who are good at seeing and hearing while not being seen or heard. Care needs to be taken, though, because many of them are already working as the eyes and ears for other interested parties. Always a game of politics, even at the lowest rungs of society.

When heading into this labyrinth of quarters and social rooms you need to know what or who you're looking for in order to find anything. Some aspect of the magic that keeps Bristelùchairt in flux also keeps this area in order by making sure anyone who comes down here has a destination. Keeps out the riffraff. Within these halls you will find a series of quarters ranging from a single room to three rooms. Every door is the same, with the exception of the number of boards that form it and the placement of the handle and hinges. The doors are all a dark-brown wood with brass handles and hinges that never tarnish. If you see one that is tarnished, be warned—dark tales tell of what lies beyond that doorway.

The quarters themselves are nothing special without the personal touch added by their occupants. The single-room style has a single hearth, a bed, and a small cooking stove. The two-room version adds a second room intended to create a private bedroom for those servants who have family, though sometimes they are rewarded to those that have served well and their masters feel they deserve a little extra space. The same is said of the three-room quarters with increased space for favored staff, though some of these places actually belong to the paramours, of some very powerful people. Rumors say that a secret entrance is part of the design so the most special of servants can move about more quietly and covertly.

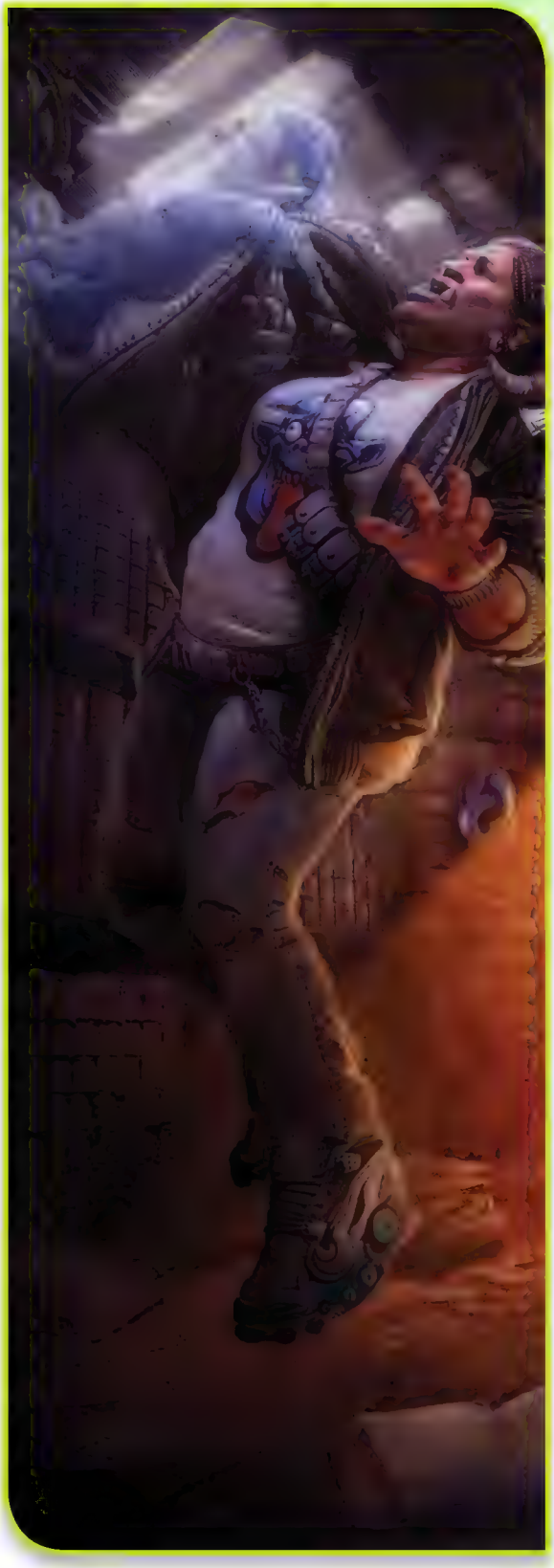
The halls of this wing are of additional interest to many. The same magics that allow this place to stay ordered also allow long, aimless walks to occur. Conversations can be had for hours while strolling these halls without ever coming across another soul. When this is needed, the goal is to have no goal. Enter the main branch of the wing and walk together with no set goal in mind. Be careful though, because if someone suddenly thinks of a goal for their walk, the next turn they make could separate them from the group in a blink. No one disappears from sight; rather, they go when no one is looking or when people blink. And the halls have a way of drawing your attention to let this happen. When it finally comes time to end the private chat, each

person can think of a different waypoint and add to the subterfuge of their clandestine conversations.

Next, let's look at somewhere you will likely become familiar with sooner rather than later, the **Guest Residences**. This section of the castle has a tremendous amount of variety in its design, with new rooms being added and a constantly shifting decor to the halls and the rooms. The size of this region of the castle is known only to the Castlekeeper, a thoroughly mad spirit of the hearth. Those willing to speculate claim his madness is a result of the fragmentary nature of his domain. Tales are whispered of curing his madness by setting Bristelùchairt back to its original state, but since none know much on how the place changes, none have ever accomplished this feat. Since the Castlekeeper is a bit unreliable, no one has an exact room count for guest residences but they are intended for short-term use rather than long term lodging. Similar to the Servant's Wing, the Guest Residences have several layouts of different sizes and type of rooms. Here, guests of the court are offered between one and four room standard lodgings, or a massive Courtsman's chamber, the last intended to house important guests and their entire entourage. The guest rooms do not have a cook stove, as guests are expected to eat with their hosts or at one of the evening banquets.

Every basic layout builds off the same foundation, with a hearth in each room. Single rooms have the bed and a small washbasin as well as a wardrobe. The decor is usually changed to fit the guests and make them feel at home, though some courtiers house guests they are not fond of and usually add small bits to the decor to make them slightly uncomfortable. Nothing overt, but perhaps a small image hidden within a painting or a vase or furnishing piece from a rival land or faction. Paired rooms have a small foyer as you enter that splits to the two rooms. The triplets have a foyer as well, but the three rooms are also linked through the central room in case it is intended more for extra social space than sleeping space. The quads are the only basic rooms with a social space built in. The foyer is replaced with a full sitting room that leads off to each bedroom.

With increasing numbers of visitors coming from the material plane, the amount of rooms shifting to a modern decor and design is increasing. These often include windows with spectacular views of places both familiar and alien to these guests. It is quite an abrupt perception shift walking from heavy stone halls through



a thick wooden door and into a space furnished to match the monstrous towers of that plane.

The layout of the Courtsman's chambers and how many are available is, again, a mystery. They all include a main sitting room, a kitchen with a cookstove and larder, a dining room, and a private privy and bath, all on the main floor. A grand staircase leads to a railed balcony above where doors and halls lead to sleeping quarters in varying counts and sizes. Decor again is created for the guests though often maintains the charm of the castle rather than changing for reasons known only to those who request the rooms. Every Courtsman's chamber has an exterior balcony and whether you entered the room on a first of fifteenth floor hall the balcony view looks out over the castle grounds and to the realms beyond.

Like most places here, none of the rooms are entirely stable. Things within the room will change, but not as frequently as rooms move. Some guests have tried to leave attendants in their quarters to keep them stable, but it never works. Even leaving the door ajar to try and lock the room in place fails to overcome the magic of Bristelùchairt.

These perpetually moving rooms have led to many interesting events over the years, and my thought has always been that this is the intention of the powers of the castle. Halls and doors look much the same, and an inadvertent stumble into the wrong room has foiled a plot or two dozen in the past and set romances that are the things of legend on their course. The worst (or best, depending on which side you are on) part of these changes occur the least often and that is the displacement of a room between guest residences. One of the few events the Queen herself will offer apologies for, these events have led to murders, affairs, and the dissolution of treaties. I'm sure it occurs more often and those involved simply keep it between themselves as they use the rare opportunity to scheme to their advantage. As the saying goes, "As the Castle goes the Court."

The final residence to speak of is the one you will least like to find yourself visiting, the **Dungeons**. Access was granted to me in order to tour this place, likely an intended lesson for me rather than an improvement on this guide, and I honestly found it quite fascinating. The thing about Bristelùchairt's dungeons is that they need to not only hold beings of physical form but also those entities that are always or sometimes insubstantial. Time is another factor to consider in a place where sentences could run into the centuries or even millennia to be effective.

The dungeons of Bristelùchairt are figuratively beneath the castle, but their true location is a twist on metaplanar geography as they aren't even on the same plane as the Seelie Court. Instead, a steeply declined hallway leads prisoners to an arch with a light-sucking black portal locked in between its barbed-chain carvings. Stepping through the portal feels like pushing through oily lightning as an electrical current flows over your skin. My tour started in blackness, and I was at first worried that it was a trap to get me to willingly walk myself into the dungeons, but illuminations returned shortly and I was greeted by the master of the dungeons, Zeha Cadgris. Zeha controls both the portal and the prison itself, and much like the castle to which it is linked, it exists in a highly transmutable state. Cells, dining halls, torture chambers, armories, and guard posts can be shifted as Zeha sees fit. Cells vary for the occupants, and none are designed for any kind of comfort. Most are cramped, and Zeha occasionally slips a prisoner in a cell that is a few sizes to small if they need a little lesson at the beginning of their sentence, while they await trial, or before questioning. In a place that incarcerates all manner of fae alongside denizens of dozens, if not hundreds, of different metaplanes, the varieties of security are remarkably similar. Put them in a cell, warn them that stepping into the blackness is doom, and shut the door.

When I went inside the cell, I felt nothing when they shut the door, but I was told to open it after a second or two. When I opened the door, the room I had come from was gone and instead that inky light-sucking blackness was there. I knew well enough to heed their warnings and chose instead to shut the door and explore my temporary, though I did worry otherwise, place of incarceration.

The small chamber, mine was a cube only a hand longer in its dimensions than my armspan, contained a single mattress of stuffed hay, a single glowing stone at the center of the ceiling, the door which I had entered through which now contained a dark portal to doom, and a small squat stone seat in the corner with a round hole at its center which again seemed to contain the blackest black I've ever seen. Any defecation by prisoners found its way to the same void of doom that prisoners who step through the doorway do.

I cannot deny I was extremely relieved when the door opened and Zeha was there to release me. To demonstrate the mutable nature of the place, I came out in a dining hall where we sat to eat some kind of

slop I think was the leftovers of oatmeal from breakfast and a meat stew from lunch. Zeha regaled me of tales about prisoners he has held and the foolish things prisoners have done. My favorite was that of Daniel Hendrickson, a metaplanar explorer who came to the Seelie Court and found himself quickly embroiled in a plot against the Queen. He had fell in with some unsavory fellows. Zeha never answered any straight questions about the Unseelie, but his emphasis on the "un" in unsavory was enough hint for even the dimmest courtier. Back to the point. Daniel was a skilled conjuror, even educated in methods to summon beings through short-lived metaplanar rifts that he could create. This is a rare knowledge, and none knew of this when he was imprisoned. Well, he escaped without a trace—something no one else had ever done in the history of the dungeons. At first, everyone thought he simply stepped into the void, but about two weeks after he did his disappearing act, the Lady Brane Deigh got wind of a man matching his description looking to retrieve some very specific foci. A little counter-investigation and a capture team later, and Daniel was back in custody.

He explained his escape honestly before the Queen, and instead of throwing him back into his cell, she set a new sentence. Daniel was ordered to attempt escape and return as many times as possible using his uncommon ability. She set Zeha to work on measures to thwart him. In the end, the best solution Zeha was able to come up with was placing a sentry in the cell to pummel Daniel every time he tried to use any magic. The simple solutions are sometimes the best.

So the lesson to take from the dungeon is that it's horrible to end up down here, and without some rare arcane skillset you aren't going to escape.

Common Grounds

Next on my list are those places anyone can go. These locations are completely public, and any restrictions on access to these sites should raise suspicions with even new visitors. So that a falsely laid importance is not laid on any public place, I will list them by the alphabet.

This puts the **Ball Rooms** up first. Many of these social sorting sites are named for the theme of their decor but a few are named for famous persons who either helped design them, died in them, or provided enough coin to the crown to have one named for them. I checked out the **Nature Ballroom** first due to the stories I had heard about locations within the ballroom so overgrown you could no longer access them. The decor of the entire ballroom is alive and constantly growing and changing. When it comes time to prepare this ballroom, the staff must trim back overgrowth. The stage and bar are live trees that have been shaped as they grew. This ballroom is used often for galas related to life (such as the Robin's Waltz) or hosted by individuals with a strong connection to nature magic.

Referred to quietly as the murder ballroom, the **Crimson Hall** could see death on a grand scale and few would be the wiser. In fact, it may have, for all I know. Heavy crimson cloth hangs over the walls and drapes from the ceiling to partition the hall for added privacy and mystery during events. The cloth smoothly flows from high up and blends with the thick red carpets of this vast chamber. A feature unique to this hall, the carpets add both a touch of added regalia and a level of comfort for guests. Dancing is not easy on carpet, and a ballroom without a place to dance would not be much of a ballroom, which means we next must discuss the crimson eye.

A single massive sheet of red glass in the shape of a crescent moon surrounds the hall's stage. I have heard others claim it is actually red diamond, a decadent display of grandeur. Either way, it is a marvel and only adds to the beauty of this hall. Special tables and chairs were crafted for the chamber from rich crimson bloodwood, from the forests of Umbrage on the Metaplane of Nature, a harrowing place with far more challenges to overcome than the iron-hard bark of the tree itself.

And finally, what is a ballroom without its signature event. The Crimson Hall has been host to Ishahf's annual Modern Masquerade for going on a century now with no sign of slipping attendance. While it is not one of the twelve major festivals of the Court's cycle, it has gained attention and prominence as a place where disguises greatly aid all manner of covert dealing and back-stabbing.

From red to blue, the next hall reminds visitors of water, sky, sapphires, or sadness and those who host within this hall know these things and vary small details to change the ambiance to fit their gala. The **Azure Spance** is named for the illusion of size created by its blue walls and ceiling that can be manipulated with only a weak flow of mana to create simple changes to alter the patterns of blue to give the feel of shallow seas, ocean depths, eternal skies, or setting night. The variety available makes this hall the single most popular party

space in all of Bristelùchairt, with some days hosting up to three events. It also is host of the popular and long-standing Midsummer Night festival, as well as the Harvest Moon Promenade. Servants and workers are in and out at all hours of the day and night getting it set for the next event.

The **Hall of Night** is like the black version of the Crimson Hall. It lacks the lush carpet and glass dance-floor but adds several levels of additional space for revelers to glide, slide, speak, and be seen. Rather than a single floor, the Hall of Night has six staggered platforms, all transparent and somehow insubstantial to the drapes, but as solid as the ground for all others. Clear stairs lead between each and guest position and preference is dependent on the event. During the Lily Gild, being "Raised to the Moon" is the highest honor, while during Red Sun Ball, those of the lowest esteem are sent to the upper heights.

The platforms can be shifted with magic or at the whims of Bristelùchairt. Each floor is about a quarter of the size of the ballroom itself, though the higher you go the smaller they get, but only by a small margin. The Hall of Night also has a permanent resident, Sylana, a spirit of air who calls this hall her home. Her presence—she manifests as an elven female with raven hair and eyes—sets the drapes in a constant flutter, adding to the ambiance of the room and leaving everyone constantly on edge due to motion in the corner of their sight. Adding to the tension, the Hall of Night has been the sight of the largest number of assassinations in the castle, though they are still not frequent enough to be considered commonplace.

Gaeaf Hall was the most wondrous of the places I took a tour of, and I have seen many places in my life. Something about perpetual snow at a comfortable climate just made me feel alive. That is the draw to Gaeaf Hall. No matter what time of year, no matter what the conditions around Bristelùchairt, the snow falls in Gaeaf Hall. The snow does not feel wet or cold but falls in beautiful flakes at all hours. It doesn't accumulate and leaves nothing damp, but instead creates a perpetual feeling of early winter and the peace of an early snowfall.

Winter events are popular here, though the attendees are usually of middling rank. Other winter seasonal gatherings rank above the events at Gaeaf Hall. The celebrations of Summer Snows are another story altogether. This event leads up to the Long Heat, setting the stage for the heated passions that inevitably erupt.

Deigh Hall is a strange place. It is public in nature but rarely used for anything more than small gatherings. The hall is named for the Queen, but she has never hosted an official event within its confines. There are many that claim the making of the room was intended as an insult to the Queen, as all the other halls are named for those no longer in power.

The interior is a classic design. A short foyer leads to a wide circle, ringed by serving bars, and surrounding tables around a central dance-floor. A raised balcony is connected via a stairwell that separates two serving areas and provides a grand entrance for any who wish to make one. Smooth grey stone and rich brown wood provide the accents and basis for the neglected hall.

Agatarish Dome is the last of the halls I will speak of, though their are many more. I conclude with this because it stands at the center of the halls those within the court will visit. This hall has seen the Lady Brane Deigh and Ashiton Keefs both stand upon the same stage and offer their words to the gathered, making it a neutral point of sorts.

The dome is named for a kappa of considerable social status. While quiet and soft spoken most of the time, Agatarish was well known for speaking wisdom at the perfect moment to bring a situation teetering on disaster back from the brink. He was a diplomat with few equals.

For his diplomatic aplomb, this hall was named for him and hosts some of the Seelie Courts most turbulent gatherings, including the occasional Feast of Hecate. In order to maintain a neutral and universally peaceful motif the entire dome—furnishings, decorations, and servant's garb—is white. Coming to a gathering held in Agatarish's Dome wearing anything but white immediately marks you as one either ignorant or defiant of this standard. Neither a good thing. The only exception is silver as an accent, and even an excess of that will be seen as an attempt to draw attention. Have I mentioned that the Court is a juggling act held upon a high wire while having daggers tossed at you?

Let us move from places of self-worship to those of other-worldly worship. The **chapels** of Bristelùchairt are intended as a place for residents and visitors alike to worship the things they hold most sacred. Since this is the Seelie Court and mirrors are sufficient for this at most times, these quiet stone structures are primarily used for quiet meetings in a place where gathering too many would raise suspicion. All the chapels are accessible around the clock, with the exception of when they are reserved for a private event or ceremony.

Meetings here are often conducted via magic to increase the the semblance of privacy, but innovative spies have actually developed methods to intercept or include themselves on conversations being held mentally.

I was told only four chapels are present in the castle at any one time. Guests are asked if they have a chapel style preference in case they want something other than the basic stone structure with wooden benches and an altar. The most common alternatives are the grove and the sky hollow. The grove is a bastion of nature created by a circular grove of trees and shrubs. The branches of the trees grow over the center of the grove in a dome while the roots emerge and submerge to create spaces to sit or lay at random around the grassy expanse. Light seems to come from everywhere and nowhere all at once, its level controlled by a sundial at the center of the grove.

The sky hollow has no structure except a circular portal used to enter and exit. It is instead an open expanse of blue sky with clouds in the distance all around. The space is defined by movement limitations rather than physical barriers. Those who enter can fly, walk, swim, or simply glide about within the space. If they reach a limit, they simply stop making progress in their motion. There is no defined up and down, so visitors are not limited by a single point of reference. The portal adjusts as users step through when they leave.

Bristelùchairt has several **Dining Halls** that are cycled through in order to accommodate the large quantity of guests and residents. Longtable Hall features a set of five tables that run the length of the room. Six hearths, each with the trophy head of a fierce creature above its mantle, burn at all hours and many a meeting has been held outside of serving hours. Each of the trophy beasts has a placard attributing the kill to a hunter. Half currently declare the name of the Queen's Champion, who had once stated a goal of wanting them all but it is hard to find beasts worthy of replacing others already present. This is the site of the Cyprian Feast.

Another high-level feast, the Regency Banquet, takes place in the Sigil Room, which has all the elegance outsiders expect from the Court, including glass chandeliers, marble pillars, oak tables, and so on. It also features a regularly rotating series of tapestries depicting notable Court events, including some that happened as recently as the previous day. The tapestries hide doors and alcoves where much of the secret business of the Regency Banquet is conducted.

Bristelùchairt Tavern is the unofficial name given to the dining hall that seats diners at bench tables along the walls and round tables of varying diameter and height, unevenly placed around the central space. At the center of the room is a four mouthed hearth that rises to the ceiling with its shared chimney. Over the four mantles are the pelts of four creatures and the weapon that brought them down. There is a tale for each that has grown over the years and you should take the time to sit and hear them all. That massive black fur with the razor gauntlet is the favorite of most. Several different mid-level banquets have used that room, and it is frequently the site of one of the Feasts of the Fallen.

Another prominent dining hall is the Cube. First, let me mention it is not a perfect cube, the sides vary in length by a handspan or two. It is not the shape that makes this dining place unique; it is the use of the space. Within the Cube, diners sit on every surface. There are a defined floor, ceiling, and walls based on the door from the kitchens but down is simply defined as the direction toward the nearest surface. This means you may look up and see diners above you on what appears to be the ceiling and walls. While this seems like some grand magical gesture and show of power, it is exactly the opposite. This dining hall is made to pack in as many hungry guests as possible in the small space. There are no decorations as there are no surfaces to decorate, and the tables and chairs are the plainest of sorts.

The draw of this place is how packed it gets and how seating is mixed. When you enter you can sit anywhere but house rules state that once a table is started it needs to be full before its served. If you want to eat, you need to make friends. Or make it look like you are making friends and instead arrange to be sitting with someone you need to speak with. A lot of business happens over meals in the Cube, making it the site of large, bustling mid-level banquets

The Grand Hall is the metaphoric heart of the public social scene within Bristelùchairt. Its massive doors sit open at all hours and allow access to a feast of foods even when the dining halls are not serving. This is one of the only spots in all the Seelie Court where the lowliest newcomers can see and be seen by the elite of the Court on a regular basis. It must be noted, though, that etiquette states business not be conducted here—this, supposedly, is a place of socialization and revelry, not plotting and spying.

Within the Grand Hall, a wide circular banquet table sits at the center of the room filled with foods from fresh fruit to roasted meat. Around the room are tall tables for gatherers to stand and talk while having a place to rest the drink that they have been served by one of the dozens of servants walking the room with mugs of ale and glasses of wine. A great hearth sits opposite the door and burns with a fire taller than most guests. Its ornate mantle contains a series of smokey orbs. Each orb shows the view from high over a different metaplane. No one seems to control what is seen at any time, but the sights are almost always glorious.

The Grand Hall is rarely reserved for private events and only closes once every few days for a cleaning or after an incident that requires cleaning up. Brawls are rare as violence is frowned upon, but first-blood duels have been known to start and end within the Grand Hall.

I need to mention the **Kitchens** only because they are public and they are one of the marvels of Bristelùchairt. The six kitchens are all located in a single place, connected together to more efficiently serve the castle. Each is shaped like a flat-edged pie wedge, and together they form a hexagon. The narrow end has a single door into and between each kitchen. The long back wall had two doors, one that leads out, the other where servers and staff return. Where the doors lead is defined by Crynixese. Crynixese is the master of the kitchens, and he controls where each door leads at a given moment. The ability to return to or access a kitchen is based on the need for servers and their schedules. They are public and any may visit, but accessing them can be a bit tricky.

Last is the various **Libraries** scattered around Bristelùchairt. Though on my tour several were close together the day I visited, their positions are mutable. You could stop in to research a bit of legend and spend some time in the stacks or reading at one of the tables and when you leave you are not in the same hall from which you arrived.

The most difficult thing about this variability is locating any piece of information a second time. Each library is distinct to those who know what to look for, but most simply see the aisles of books, mix of tables and chairs, and cabinets of scrollcases. They don't notice that every shelf has a fox head or a rose blossom or a ship's wheel. They don't recognize the busts of ancient scholars there to impart and share their wisdom. To most, including me, Galkion and Histrogus, both croki scholars, look the same. Finding the same library twice requires knowing what you are looking for and who to ask.

Meetings, both public and private, are often held in the libraries of Bristelùchairt. Whether it is a clandestine

conversation across the stacks or a gathering of a dozen historians about to argue a point with a need for resources nearby, the library sees it all.

Those Places Beyond

Public or private doesn't matter in a place like this when some spots just can't be found. Bristelùchairt is full of places that many long-time residents have never seen. The vastness of the castle is often thought of as immeasurable, and some of these next places put those ideas to the test. I was told my list of places only scratches the surface of those unique spots within the castle, so keep your eyes open for other interesting places here.

The first of the places I found to visit was like a different world or a perpetual masquerade within the castle. Its entrance is distinct when you spot it. Rather than the solid wood doors of the castle, this location has a pair of stubby swinging doors. They're great, since you can see what you're walking into, but even knowing that, it's hard to resist the pull of such a different place. Within the tavern revelers frolic, gamble, drink, and dine in a space modeled after the boomtowns of the western United States on the material plane in the mid-nineteenth century. Though I say modeled when the space actually changes the guests, so the guests are actually modeled after **Gallow's**.

Gallow's is a tavern with rooms for rent. As strange as that sounds within the castle, it exists. The place only has eight rooms, but each is spacious enough for two comfortably, though sleeping comfort is not usually what visitors seek, as Gallow's also has a small cadre of attendants who will tend to guest's needs beyond food and drink. Access to the rooms is located along the balcony above the main hall. Keys are purchased from the bartender.

Spotting a member of the Court here is not difficult even with the drastic change in wardrobe. It actually occurs rather frequently, as this is a great place to meet on neutral ground. It is also one of the few places with extensive gambling going on and those with money and power to spare love to come and show off.

Thanks to this little project, I have a new favorite place within the castle. The trouble will be finding it again in order to enjoy it. The **Spire** is famous for the view it offers, and like most wonders of Bristelùchairt it does so with no regard for spatial references. The entrance to the Spire is identified by the carving at the top of its doorway, which depicts large raptor, whose wings form the frame.

On the other side of the doors, the room opens up into a full circular chamber that surrounds the central pillar where the doorway comes through. The shape of the room is not the only bit of spatial defiance and not even the greatest. What makes the Spire the Spire is the view. All around the room the windows look down on the area around Bristelùchairt. When you're outside, you never see a massive spire or even a tower of any great height. However, the view from the Spire is easily two hundred meters above the ground, and the entrance has appeared everywhere from the lower halls of the castle to the towers that rise several stories into the air.

As for the purpose, it has none specific to it. Social gatherings occur here if the participants time it right or get lucky in locating it, but the Spire is one of the more unstable locations within the castle. For it to move ten times in a single day is not uncommon.

Since I know it is a thought, I will address the question of the distressed using the spire's elevation as a means to end their misery. Short answer: It doesn't work. Outside the window gaps is a field of invisible force that prevents anyone from leaving the Spire through the windows.

I have also been told that the place is shielded magically to prevent exiting that way. My source was not sure if this was a feature of the Spire or simply part of the castle's overall desire to prevent astral movement.

I was truthfully scared to visit the **Pendulum**. I had heard tales of broken bones and other serious injuries, and I had no desire to gain injury on top of the insult of doing this in the first place. You may think this a violent place, where brawls break out on a regular basis, but in truth it is a quite peaceful platform for deep conversations. Due to its strange nature it attracts many of the more science-minded of the Court's visitors and residents to discuss reasons for physical laws being so powerfully manipulated by arcane techniques. As you may have already guessed by the name, the Pendulum is a room, though I use the term loosely, that is constantly swinging. The doorway, on the other hand, stays stationary and is the source of injuries for those entering and leaving, as one must immediately gain their balance upon entry and time their leap to the doorway perfectly when leaving.

Visually the room looks to be a large wooden floor suspended by four thick wooden ropes that suspend it in a vast field of inky blackness. The ropes disappear into the darkness that surrounds the room. Light in the space comes from two sources. A chandelier hangs in the air above the center of the room casting shifting shadows as the room swings, while each table contains a three-branch candelabrum with candles that don't burn down, cannot be blown out, and yet still are affected by the motion of the chamber. The tables in the space are simple wooden platforms. A total of thirteen tables set in two rows are evenly spaced out over the floor, with the uneven fourteenth space holding the entrance.

The blackness that surrounds the room is a void of some sort. Leaping from the edge or missing the doorway doesn't result in death. Instead, those it has happened to describe it as a sort of sleeping with vivid dreams. Waking from the dream involves stepping through another doorway within the dream that brought them out at a random door within Bristelùchairt.

From the first time I heard of it, I wanted to experience the **Everhall**, a hallway that stretches forever. Keep walking, and it keeps going. Decide on a destination or want to return, simply turn around and walk back the way you came. No matter how far you have walked, the destination is always within another score of steps back the way you came. The vastness is created by the sconces on the wall that ignite and extinguish as you move along. Ahead and behind, the stone walls and tile floor continue within the light, but nothing is visible beyond the sconce-lit passage.

Courtiers use this place for exceptionally long and private conversations when they want to avoid attention. As long as they keep walking together, the hall continues, and they won't run into anyone else walking the hall. Occasionally a distant murmuring conversation can be heard, but nothing can ever be discerned from the sounds.

The greatest thing about the Everhall is that it can lead anywhere. As long as the walker knows where they are going or who they are going to see, when they turn back to find them, they will be where they need to be. This isn't perfect, as many people don't wish to be found and many places aren't always present in Bristelùchairt, but it can be quite useful for one who needs to see a lot of people or visit many rooms in the castle in a short amount of time.

The Everhall also has a bit of a nefarious reputation. Its unending vastness is said to hold uncountable bodies from those who took a walk with the wrong person. I wanted to do a little test of this, but I'm no murderer, so instead I brought a rat with me on my walk. After I worked up the will to go through with my plan, I killed the rat and set its body on the floor of the hall. I walked away until the moment I lost sight of the corpse in the darkness and then turned back to find the rat gone and a random hallway of the castle ahead of me. I still wonder what happened to the rat.

If you wish to know what is going on in the darkest corners of Bristelùchairt, find your way to **Gilik's**. Here you can rub elbows with the shadiest of court-going folk, all without ever leaving the castle. You also get to rub elbows with those courtiers and attendants who wish to have a good time in a place that doesn't care about the formalities and niceties of court life.

The entrance is a bit off-putting for most folks, because it's only a meter high. The short frame is formed by a pair of burly, bearded dwarfs raising their tankards in toast. After ducking through, for most folks, you find four stories of raucous fun. The first story is a broad square tavern with chipped tables, a nicked-up bar, a small stage, and the angriest waitstaff in the metaplanes, probably because they have to walk up stairs and work

across four stories. A small kitchen serves a narrow menu of roast meat, boiled potatoes, and soup, likely made from the previous day's leftovers. The stage usually has an entertainer of some sort, most often musical, with about as much talent as the serving girls have patience but drinks flow quickly here and tolerance grows long.

The stories above are accessed from a central open stair that turns to the next level at each landing. A string of chandeliers hangs from the roof through the center of the open central atrium, with one at a height to illuminate each level. The second story contains more tables but these are not for sitting—they are filled with dealers and gamesmasters running games of chance for the house. The games vary by night and sometimes shift in the middle of the evening if a skilled gambler or powerful figure wishes a specific game, though most will claim the game changes when the house loses too much money or when patrons hit a lucky streak. A section opposite the stairs is also cleared out for games of throwing skill, a common place to find some of Bristelùchairt's deadliest marksman.

The third tier is once again designed for sitting, socializing, and sating ones thirst. Ember Banquets are frequently staged here. It's a wee bit quieter, but the music and chatter from below can often still be heard all the way up here, providing a din of background noise to keep close conversations from drifting too far. The serving girls seem to cool their tempers on this floor. I would suspect it has to do with the more restrained clientele that come this high for more private chatter, but many whisper it is due to a boisterous server being tossed over the rail for insulting a patron. If anyone was thrown over, it was probably because they heard or saw something they shouldn't have and the source needed them silenced but who am I to discount rumors.

The top floor holds a mix of all the lower floors. At the top of the stairs is another bar, this one in far better shape. Patrons here can grab a drink and then head right or left for games of chance or quiet conversations respectively. The games on this floor are no longer played against the house. Instead, they pit gamblers head to head with the house earning a small percentage of the initial funds up for grabs in order to mediate the events. The conversation spaces here are also a bit more private, with high-backed curved booths that include curtains that can be drawn to completely conceal the space from prying eyes.

The fourth wall, opposite the bar, is Gilik's domain. His private guests gain access to him and those he needs to meet can make their way up here, where Gilik holds court. It's this strange high station of royalty and reclusiveness that feed into the rumors that Gilik is influential in the Unseelie Court or the Death faction of the Seelie Court. He does get a large number, and wide variety, of unique visitors, including the Queen's Champion, Serrin Sol, as well as several past Executioners. He has some connection and power within the court, but none know its exact nature.

The rumors around Gilik and the wild nature of this place lead many to utter unsupported rumors that Gilik's is a bastion of the Unseelie within Bristelùchairt. While I am sure there are many individuals of questionable alliances and moral compass within Gilik's on any given night, I can't imagine the Court would allow the place to continue within its domain if it supported the very antithesis of all their beliefs.

The influence of the material plane has long been growing within Bristelùchairt. Within the memory of many they recall when the castle had no modern touches and even when it directly rejected their arrival. That is no longer the case and the **Skytower** is the proof. From the moment you come across the strange steel-and-glass door in sharp contrast to the stone hallway, you can tell something is going to be different. The door does not lead directly in, instead it opens to a spiraling stairwell that mixes steps of the castle's stone with steel and concrete at seemingly random intervals. At the top is an open doorway that leads into a vast open-air circular chamber.

The cylindrical space has no windows along its outer walls, which are formed by a mix of stone and shining steel flowing through like a river. The inner cylinder, where the door comes through, is all shiny silver steel. The sky overhead is a picturesque blue with soft white clouds gently passing over the majority of the time. Those who spend great sums of time here told me they have seen the sky grow cloudy and even witnessed lightning storms in the distance, but it never rains. Even when the lands around the castle are storming, the Skytower is beautiful.

The grounds of the Skytower are completely open with the exception of a small greenhouse where a few fresh vegetables and some rather beautiful flowers are grown. The rest of the space possesses wandering

paths with benches, tables, and the occasional gazebo. None of these looks as if it belongs within a castle. The benches are metal and functional rather than ornate. The tables and gazebos much the same. It is as if someone took a piece of Manhattan's Central Park and dropped it on the top of a tower. Just as a little nature exists in urban parks, there are a dozen trees, one growing within each realm of an hour on the clock, and they always have ripe fruit for a quick sweet treat on a walk.

Most think of this place as a spot for young lovers to come for a picnic and to marvel at the sights of another world. This appears to be its primary use, but it also makes a fine place for a pleasant meeting where nefarious topics are discussed in the light of the sun or the moon despite their dark nature. Appearance is important here, and a few pleasantly dressed courtiers strolling through the winding paths could not possibly be discussing a plot to bring down a Court official. The reality is the opposite—everyone knows dark deals and treachery are happening, and yet they treat it like it's normal.

As I find it necessary to mention more and more with these places of alternate spatial rules, the walls cannot be climbed, and objects cannot be tossed over. Anyone who has tried to climb the walls becomes dizzy and disoriented as they near the top, usually falling back to the ground. Items tossed, no matter how heavy, are caught in a swirling breeze and dropped back into the open chamber. Tests of this are frowned upon by civilized courtiers, especially with the risk of thrown items hitting others.

Bristelùchairt has existed for a long time, and as such it has remnants and leftover elements of history bound into its nature. Courtiers arrived and brought traditions of their homeland, and Bristelùchairt clung to those concepts for whatever reason. That is how one can step through a square doorway in a hallway that looks much like a medieval castle and pass into the **Chambers**, a space reflective of the inside of an Egyptian pyramid from North Africa. Sandy, rough stone lines narrow passages lit by smoky torches. These open into chambers with a variety of geometric shapes. The single doorway leads to an inner lair with over thirty recorded rooms, including many sleeping chambers or gathering halls.

This spot is seeing increased use by visitors from the material plane who study Egypt's arcane traditions. To some, it is an honor and a privilege to stay in a place built for royalty. Dead royalty, I know, but royalty none the less. To others, it is a gimmicky place that reflects the ancient origins of their tradition but still feels like some cheesy tourist trap. Their words, not mine. To all who take the time to look and feel the energy of this place, it is a place of power for those who honor its traditions.

The Chambers also draws the attention of metaplanar explorers. It is common knowledge that the writings that can be found etched over all the walls of this place bear clues to accessing rarely reached metaplanes. The early Egyptian visitors to the Seelie Court were said to be renowned explorers, and their custom was to scribe their journey notes upon the walls of their structures. Those that left from Bristelùchairt did their scrawling on the walls of the Chambers.

The rumormongers whisper of a hidden faction that operates from a hidden section of the Chambers. I'm not sure there are hidden sections, but I know there are some spots that are extremely difficult, if not impossible, to reach. I have peeked through narrows no broader than a knuckle at a space that showed no signs of use and no other doorways, at least as far as I could see.

The **Labyrinth** was a challenge I gladly accepted and found myself humbled by in the long run. The very long run. I spent three days within this series of rooms when my goal and intent had been to spend only as many hours. The rooms of the Labyrinth are connected in a confusing pattern that takes only a short time to get lost within, and then a far longer time to discover the pattern and get back out. I'm sure those entering with a more humble mind may make it out faster. I was so sure I would discover the pattern, I stepped through four or five more doors from the first to make it truly challenging. This is not a place for the dim or the arrogant.

Every room within the Labyrinth looks nearly identical, and no one knows the total number. Each has four stone walls interrupted by twelve archways, three on each of the walls. Each archway has a flower at its peak. The flowers appear nearly identical, but they are not. The floor of every room has a twelve-pointed-star pattern with a fire-filled pit and four benches at the center, each facing the pit and its opposite corner. The ceiling contains long, glowing shards that point out from a small central dome out to each of the corners. I'll give no more information on the pattern.

I managed to survive thanks to the second feature of the Labyrinth, the minotaurs. There are several of them who live—or work, it was hard to tell—within

the Labyrinth. They move rather easily through the various rooms seeking those who are lost. They bear food and drink but offer no clues or advice to those seeking to escape. If a visitor has given up, the minotaurs offer a special loaf of bread and a drink. The two combine to activate a powerful sleeping spell. Once unconscious, the minotaur carries the visitor out and deposits them in the hallway outside the entrance. Feigning sleep in order to discern the minotaur's path earns their ire, and they are perfectly capable of rendering a visitor unconscious in a far less pleasant way. When this occurs, the deceiver is left on a bench in the center of the entry room with a note which reads, "One in Twelve were better Odds than you had Before." They then have one chance to get it right or begin getting themselves lost again.

The minotaurs don't just deposit sleeping bodies outside the doorway—they also leave dead ones. Some have crossed the minotaurs and earned no aid and starved to death, others appear to be the victims of foul play, as some claim the Labyrinth is a great place to commit violence and leave a body hidden for a time. The minotaurs always find them eventually, even those that have been tossed into the fire to burn. Investigators are sometimes led to the chamber where the victim was found in hopes of finding a clue, but many wonder if the minotaurs simply take them wherever they please just to get them to go away.

Along with hidden violence, the Labyrinth sees a lot of clandestine meetings. Once the pattern is understood, it can be used to get to specific rooms for a private chat, though a single wrong turn means going back to start from the beginning.

While violence as a form of political maneuvering is frowned upon, the act itself has been used as entertainment and sport for millennia. Within the halls of Bristelùchairt, if you come across a massive set of double doors carved in a scene of man battling beast, know that what lies beyond is the Arena, sometimes called the Coliseum by those who can only remember a narrow section of history.

Beyond the door, the nose is immediately assaulted with the scent of blood and sweat, poorly masked in oils and perfumes. The entryway leads into a wide tunnel that splits into two paths. To the right walk the fighters, those who wish to participate in the demonstrations of skill and martial mastery. To the left walk the spectators, there for entertainment and no small amount of wagering. While I tried to tour both, the masters of the Arena follow a very strict code that only allows combatants into the Warriors' Hallow. Any who enter can only leave by passing through the Victor's Gate from the floor of the arena.

On the path I took I found places to dine, drink, and place official wagers on upcoming fights, all nestled in a ring underneath the stone seats where one watches the action. I am not a huge fan of violence, and I only stepped up to the stands between matches. The ring of angled seating surrounds the entire arena floor. Two sections, one directly over the Warrior's Gate and opposite that over the Victor's Gate, are filled with more comfortable seats and usually filled with those powerful members of Court who wish to be entertained by death. The Lady Brane Deigh even came once while Lord Serrin entered the ring to settle an unofficial squabble. Battles within the arena are fought between any form of life that exists and is capable of combat.

The fights occur down on the sand, but the real action occurs in the stands. This is yet another of those places where unofficial meetings and hidden dealings are taken care of in a semi-public forum. Agents of one courtier or another will meet and exchange the messages of their masters. At least once this message was sent upon entry when one of the Steward's nephews was pulled over to the Warriors' Hallow while the Steward was in attendance at the order of the Queen. The young man did not survive his encounter with a breschan. Exactly who guided the young man down the wrong hall is unknown, but most believe it was an agent of the Queen sending the Steward a message.

The newest chamber to suddenly arise within Bristelùchairt has been dubbed the **Geocache**. This realm is a near-identical reflection of the material plane's Matrix from the early 2050s. Passing through the door shifts the visitor to a strange analogy of their own form but created from geometric shapes in a variety of sizes. The plane of existence stretches out in a blackness overlaid with a green grid of intersecting beams of light. Hovering high above are eight massive structures said to represent the megacorporations of that era, though no logos exist. A pagoda, castle, stepped temple, black monolith, red sun, black-and-gold mountain, silver star, and green swirling sphere all hover in the air above the black-and-green grid. There is no concept of gravity, and this chamber seems to be infinitely vast but capable of being crossed with a thought. One moment you can be standing inside the doorway, and the next be outside the sealed drawbridge of the castle above.

The structures above are rumored to be accessible, but I was unable to determine how and didn't see anyone else entering or leaving them during my time inside Geocache. Those who spread them support these rumors with tales of the inside of each structure. They talk about how their geometric-shaped form changes to look like the real them with a shift in dress and appearance to match the theme of the outside. I was not made a believer when I couldn't get two people to give the same description of inside the black monolith, a shape with no apparent theme.

A better-supported rumor has arisen recently with the influx of visitors who were already acquainted with this virtual realm back home. These "hackers" seem more at home here and may have additional skills and knowledge that would allow them access to the structures above.

For those who like to take their revelry and celebration to extremes, seek out **Hakari Marama**. The entrance, and thus the exit as well, varies over a cycle, right alongside the moon. The circular opening matches the phase of the moon, leaving a span of days between the waxing and waning crescent where passage through the door is limited to the smallest of beings and a time of the new moon where no one can get through. These days are when the celebrations get the most uninhibited.

Passing the threshold is a bit of an extreme step as well. In both directions. The passageway is a like a hole at the base of the massive black sphere that is the room. Within the sphere, down is always relative to the feet of the guest—perfect for the entry to a room that is a sphere. The spherical chamber is also illuminated based on the current lunar phase, generally of the moon of terra. That means during the new moon, the doors are closed and the lights are out. At the full moon, the entry is wide open and guests can see the beauty of all the floor, a reflection of the moonscape that ties into the room.

The sphere is truly massive. The seating and tables are created by textured craters, and there are no pieces of furniture. A large crater opposite the entry portal is

used as a bar and stocks extra food, water, and libations for times when the doors are sealed. An abundance of other substances are available for the users' enjoyment while they are within Hakari Marama. Of late, revelers have been seeking out a new treat: tiny beetles that, when eaten, give a euphoric disembodied experience.

The stories I was told of events that occurred within the New Moon parties, as locals call them, are barely believable. Murders where all are trapped trying to determine who among them is the killer. Murders where all those care little, and the party continues. Rituals that build power and suddenly unleash it as the seal breaks. Trapped meetings between factions on the verge of open conflict, solved with a few days of forced cooperation. And there are events that are out-and-out parties, a week straight of nothing but self-indulgence and unbridled debauchery.

I personally was afraid to spend that many days in a place where I didn't know anyone, and I'm not one for riotous gatherings. Again, I think this may have been another lesson delivered with great subtlety.

So with the tales of the wild Hakari Marama I close my tour. There are so many more places in this castle, and some I will never, have never, and hope to never see. For those curious about Bristelùchairt, feel free to wander; it will show you what you need to see. But be warned. You may wish to always travel with a few friends, as every corridor could lead to a new adventure here within the halls of Bristelùchairt.

Valuable Information

I've done my work and scouted out some items that might be of interest to your people here inside the castle. Tivta Farspoken allowed me to add information here, since once people know about artifacts, they are eager to learn about where information about such things may be found. Artifacts and locations go together well, so here are some things that are the subject of courtiers' discussions and searches. I also know that the type of person likely to be looking at this info is the type of person likely to make the best use of it.

THE WHISPERING FEATHER

A white-and-gold feather approximately two hands long. The gold is actual metal but was not added or gilded—it is a part of the original creature. This item is said to whisper softly to its bearer whenever anyone they lay their gaze upon has ill intentions towards them. I have seen it occasionally blended into the outfits worn by Lady Brane during several official Court sessions.

After one such session she passed it off to one of her attendants who didn't bring it to the vaults. They brought it back up to the queen's chambers. I know, no easy spot to access, but at least it's better than the vaults.

THE CIRCLE SWORD

This is a longsword of traditional elven make that has been bent into a perfect circle. While it is no longer functional as a weapon, it is said to grant its owner incredible strength. I located this one when I saw Abergeen Brugh, a diminutive human interested in playing the politics of the Court, provoke a conflict in a tavern outside the castle. When he threw a full-grown troll through a stone wall, I knew something was up.

Curiosity made me follow him, and I saw no signs of a spell upon him or any other enchantments. Thus I began asking around to his limited number of attendants to discover his newfound strength to be a recent event, but perpetually present. Sifting through their words and giving no indication of what I was looking for, I caught mention of a new decoration that Brugh keeps over his bed: a bent sword.

To the libraries I went to discover the tale of the Circle Sword. The blade belonged to the legendary swordmaster Dey Bara. Bara was renowned for his agile death strikes, but more so known as a hunter of cucui. He, and his sword's, demise came at the hands of a cucui that trapped the swordsman's blade by twisting it within its own armored hide. Without the blade, Dey was quickly overpowered, but the wounds to the cucui were fatal, if slow to take. The two died together, and they say the strength of both fused into the magic of the blade.

CRYSTAL TRAVELLER

This arm-length crystal statue of a cloaked figure with a wide-brimmed hat has been a target of mine for years. The problem has been that the statue moves at will, hence its name. I still have not discerned a pattern, but I have found a way to keep it in place for a day—and I already know the secret of holding it in place for good. If I can spot it and get the lock in place, we can then plan a job for later. So far I've seen it in taverns, various individuals' apartments, the libraries, and even within random hallways, so it could be as easy as a distract-and-grab or maybe a full-blown heist.

I have the iron band that will hold it in place when dropped over the brim of the hat and can hand it off if we have agents we can rely on. I'm not willing to pass off the case. I'll need to be brought in for the grab.

If you didn't already know, the statue is said to be able to bring others with it when it moves. I may not know where I'll end up, but I'm sure I'd be able to grab something valuable on the way out.

ORN'S EAR

This is not an actual ear at all, but rather the horn of a troll wizard known only as Orn. Intricate carvings cover the entire horn and fuel its powers. The horn can reportedly hear the speech of anyone the user can picture, and if a link to a group of individuals are placed within the horn, more voices can be heard.

Orn was a master of divination and clairaudience, and with his death, some portion of his magic found its way into his horns. I know one was destroyed, but the second was recently rumored to be in the possessions of Tesel Nob. His recent growth in power is likely due to the use of the horn on his fellow courtiers. I have not seen him use the item in public, and thus it must be stored within his private chambers.

THE EYES OF GHARNIGA

Thankfully, these aren't real eyes either, but rather a pair of red sapphires as wide as a troll knuckle. These gems are said to possess individual, as well as joint, magical properties, but I am yet to completely sift myth from reality. What I do know is who is in possession of them.

These items are currently separated with the possessor of each trying to gain the other. I came across a message being moved between these two courtiers who are trying to determine a deal that makes all happy but is more likely going to result in something much darker before the deal is struck. Lady Keesie Bage and Lord Nebanius Mantletaker each possess one of the gems. Both have apartments within Bristelùchairt, but they also have estates outside the castle where the items might be stored.

KETEL'S DAGGER

I'm not sure other's interest in this next item will be as great as mine, but it has value. The dagger is made from solid gold and encrusted with all manner of gemstones, blade and all. It belongs to Ketel, hence the name, a pompous courtier of considerable girth who wears the gaudy blade along with the rest of his ridiculous gem-studded jewelry and attire. He is not some warrior or thief of legend that had a blade named after him, just an ass who needs to be put in his place.

If we need an angle to get his dagger, look to his enemies, for they are abundant. See if any would like to make a statement. Depending how they want, the statement made could mean several different methods of grabbing the blade. A stealthy home invasion could show he is not safe in his home, while a drubbing on the streets or in a quiet hall could show he's not safe outside his home.

THE CLOAK OF HAWIN

Another niche market item, this is a stark white cloak made from the hide of a unicorn, said to protect wearers from the sun. It could be quite valuable to some of our clients of a nocturnal nature. We also may want a buyer lined up before the job, because this is such a limited-need item, any investigation will cut off avenues of sale quickly.

On a positive note, the current owner does not possess it for its arcane properties. Instead, it is one of a myriad of trophies she has collected from the beings she has slain. Yup, it's in the collection of Lady Kestia Darkbane, alongside the Blade of Hark, the Singing Stake, the Everpearl, the Mantle of Sephyr, and plenty of other items any self-respecting sun-hater would want out of her possession. With the Lady's frequent hunting trips and departures from her apartments, we can have a wide window to acquire the item, or items, before anyone notices.

THE CORNERSTONE

This was one artifact at one point, and it has since been shattered. If all the pieces were brought together and repaired, it is said Bristelùchairt would finally be stable. Not that anyone is actually looking to do that. I feel most of the members of Court prefer the mutable nature of the castle. What is important is what actions individual pieces allow. Each piece of this artifact is said to grant the user limited control over the structur. They can find places they need faster, and use doorways to make quick moves between places. A valuable tool for anyone.

I know where four pieces currently reside. Two in the possession of Court members' agents, one in the possession of a well-known tavern owner, and the last in the rock collection of a small child. I'm sure there are more around, but these ones I can confirm.

Adek Rak, agent of Magister Vyperalyn, holds one. He uses it as a means to move and gather messages

and information for his master. I'm sure it is almost always on his person, making it difficult to obtain, but a possible late-night visit to his quarters or a sleight-of-hand switch can help us determine where he holds the powerful rock.

Suessian Hingewater, agent of Garbh Filíochta, has been using her piece of the Cornerstone to move about the castle on errands for her unique master. The Jester of the Court is not one that people would expect to have an agent, but Suessian is a loyal follower of Garbh and interested in one day possibly taking her place. I see this as an opportunity to drive a wedge as a long-term maneuver but our focus here is on the stone. Picking her pocket would not be wise as she would likely spot it, but a random mugging may work. Problem is, she has the stone and is nearly impossible to follow. A trap would need to be arranged.

Gilik, of Gilik's mentioned in Tivta's tour above, has one of the stones. He keeps it locked away in a safe in his small section of the fourth floor of his tavern. A distraction might get us access, but getting caught crossing Gilik could be bad for all. A deal could be struck for use by a separate agent and then maybe a mugging. That way the loss blame goes on the patsy while we gain the stone.

Aesha Viltharion, niece of the current Executioner, has somehow gained a powerful artifact to add to her collection of mundane rocks. She doesn't know what it is or what is does, but she treasures this gift none the less. At her last birthday, all Aesha wanted was rocks for her collection. Courtiers interested in gaining favor with her uncle, not yet the Executioner, brought rocks from all over the metaplanes, including this one. Whether it was given intentionally or not is unknown, but it now sits in one of the thousands of little glass cubes within her rock room. Gaining it by direct theft will requires someone with exceptional agility and either memory- or arcane-assessment skills. The cubes are all stacked, and to pull one would bring them all down, so some unstacking and re-stacking would be necessary to keep it a secret. Then there's the task of locating a single rock among hundreds of similar rocks.

THE HEART OF BRISTELÙCHAIRT

No, I don't know where it is, but I wanted to talk about putting more effort into locating it. Everything I've read says it has to be within the castle. Since no one seems to be the all-powerful ruler of the castle's form and structure, it must still be hidden. No one could resist that kind of power in this place. If we could gain control of the Heart, we would be able to reshape this place as we've desired to do for so long, and none of these order-loving Court sycophants would be able to do anything about it.

Game Information: The Castle's Treasures

So we talk about a lot of artifacts here, but what do they do? In many ways, the exact powers are up to the gamemaster, but here are some ideas to get you going. Remember, that even in the Court, everything has a price, so great gifts have to be paid for—somehow.

The Whispering Feather activates whenever its bearer looks as a specific individual. While looking, the Feather speaks to the bearer in a quiet whisper about the person's intentions. It is not limited to negative intent but can also speak on a trustworthy, questionable, or unknown individual. The whispering is actually auditory, so most wear the feather near their ear in a hat, mask, or within their hair to make it easier to hear. Outsiders may well try to eavesdrop on it. Using it takes concentration, meaning there is a penalty to visual perception while wearing the feather.

The Circle Sword allows its owner to reduce Body and increase Strength proportionately. Whatever trade off they make lasts for two days, so users must be careful about the choices they make. The owner does not have to carry the sword, just be the one in possession of it.

The runners could be hired to quietly look into the death of Abergeen Brugh. They hear the rumors of his strength but learn that it failed him at the wrong time. When they investigate, the sword becomes suspect, but it hangs where it always has. The truth is that one of his son's came into the bedroom and took the sword down to play with it at the wrong time for his father.

The *Crystal Traveller* moves those who touch it with it when it shifts places, but the end location cannot be controlled. This move also causes extreme physical stress on the user in the form of 5P damage, resisted with Body alone. The iron ring on the hat locks the statue in place for

Truths Of The Dungeons

The metaplanar realm where the dungeon (p. 98) resides is a lush jungle environment, and the primary structure of the dungeons is a pyramidal temple resembling those of early Native American cultures. The areas surrounding this place are full of all sorts of deadly creatures, but it is accessible without entering through the portal. This is information very few people have, and most would never divulge this truth unless they really needed access to the dungeons without using the portal.

The portal is a metaplanar gateway locked open and leading to the central chamber of the aforementioned pyramid. The moment a prisoner exits the portal, they activate a powerful anchored spell that takes their visual sensory abilities away, even astral perception. The spell ends when the target is touched by another spelled object, the seeing stick, and for most it feels like suddenly stepping out of a magical darkness. The guards in the main chamber have sticks and use them on newly arrived and secured prisoners, but they occasionally leave a new arrival blind if they are concerned about violence.

Last, the cells and the void. These are another subterfuge meant to keep prisoners in line. [illegible] false portal that drops the escapee into another [illegible] their mind. They are not [illegible] metaplanar locations that accept them. The portals within the toilets go to a third temple [illegible] defecated matter and a few sad souls who thought it a wise escape route.

exactly twenty-four hours from when it is placed, and a lead crystal case can be made that can prevent the statue from moving while inside. The case cannot be taken with when the traveller moves and drops to the floor, likely to shatter unless someone catches it. This means the Traveller cannot be relocked at the destination. An iron ring can be brought along, but if this happens too often the intelligence of the statue will start making multiple moves in quick succession, likely killing the bearer. The statue will also immediately move once the case is opened unless still under the time limit of a ring.

Orn's Ear creates an effect similar to Clairaudience at will. The ability has no range limitations as long as the user succeeds at a Memory (2) Test with a negative dice pool modifier equal to the Force of any wards between the user and the target. This test is needed to make a connection with each individual. When samples from many targets are available, a roll for each is needed. For this they have to have a viable link, in the form of a personal item or a physical sample that is placed inside the end of the horn and destroyed after a single use.

The Eyes of Gharniga are currently the source of a cold war within the Court by their owners. The two are making moves to try to undermine the other to the point where neither can afford to keep their eye and must trade it to regain stability. The Eyes have three abilities, one in the left, one in the right, and one when they are combined. With the left Eye, the user can scry through walls and solid earth of any thickness for a distance of one hundred meters. With the right Eye, the user can locate anyone they picture with their mind's eye. The ability has no range limitations as long as the user succeeds at a Memory (2) Test with a negative dice pool modifier equal to the force of any wards between the user and the target. With both Eyes in their possession, the user can extend the ability to see through things out to one kilometer, locate individuals using their possessions or a link to them, and see and read auras perfectly even if they are not Awakened or have an Assensing skill.

The eyes tap into the same type of magic as the coimeádaí, and they can make breaking into them more difficult. They effectively increase Noise by 3 for a radius of one hundred meters, and they will get the attention of any coimeádaí in that range, which could introduce difficulties when trying to sneak by Keepers.

Ketel's Dagger is not a mundane prop. It actually possesses the power to turn living matter into gems and gold. Ketel always wears a glove when handling the dagger as he lost part of his pinky the first time he touched the object. Changing large amounts of materials requires extended contact, but clues to the ability are left behind when slivers of skin have turned to gold around a cut or drops of blood have formed into precious gems.

The Cloak of Hawin neutralizes all Allergies, not just those to sunlight. Hawin, however, made it famous for its ability to protect him, a vampire, while walking in broad daylight. This item can get some serious value back on the streets of the Material Plane, especially with the increased potency of Allergies with the Infected. Its use can by physiologically addictive, though; it has an Addiction Rating of 5 and an Addiction Threshold of 2.

The *Cornerstone* allows users to use the mutability of the castle to their slight advantage. When stepping through a doorway, they can move to somewhere else in the castle. They have no real control over the move, but they can simply jump back and forth through a doorway to move several times. Each move takes a toll, though. The user suffers increasing damage each time they use the Cornerstone piece in a lunar cycle. The effect starts at 1P damage, resisted with Body, and increases by 1 every time they travel through a doorway. The damage resets with each new moon.

Aesha knows exactly what she has, and it isn't among the regular stones. She keeps it in the stand by her bed and wanders the castle at night, exploring.

The Heart of Bristelùchairt is something special ...

Creatures of the Court

There are many creatures that make up the Seelie Court. Elves, of course, are common, as are spirits of all kinds. Other metahuman types are becoming more common, but there are far fewer of them than there are of other types of fae and miscellaneous creatures. Below are just some of the types of critters, spirits, and fae that can be found in and around the Seelie Court, combined with information on the role they play in the Court—and the dangers they may present.

Alp-luachara

The alp-luachara have always been a source of contention in the Seelie Court, being neither intelligent enough to be regarded as fully sapient nor beastial enough to be dismissed as simple animals. Governed by hunger, the joint-eaters are indiscriminate eaters, happily inhabiting any digestive system that presents itself, and then devouring precisely half of whatever their host consumes.

This dietary peculiarity led scholars to speculate that the alp-luachara might be smarter than initially believed, or at least capable of passing on basic traditions to their offspring. (A separate group points out that there's no evolutionary advantage in this behavioral quirk, and that the joint-eaters' penchant for eating only half of their host's stomach contents might, in fact, be indicative of a degenerative neurological ailment.)

Whatever the case, the fae do not regard the alp-luachara as anything more than a nuisance, having had centuries to learn how to co-exist with the ravenous subspecies. Very recently, perhaps influenced by interaction with the earthly plane, certain members of nobility have taken to the controversial practice of keeping joint-eaters as pets, both for fashionable and utilitarian purposes.

Humans and metahumans, on the other hand, enjoy a far less less cordial relationship with the alp-luachara. It is unknown how many terrestrial stories can be directly attributed to this creature. Sleeping paralysis, after all, is a common phenomenon, and who knows how often it is rooted in alp-luachara behavior. Still, at least a few cultures possess legends that corroborate with the basic nature of the alp-luachara, although it could be argued that fact followed fiction, and it was the joint-eaters who adopted the appearance of their mythological counterparts. No one knows for certain which is the case, and no one seems particularly interested in finding out.

One thing is clear, however—the alp-luachara love the material plane and everything about it. Visitors from that plane are invariably swarmed by any Joint-Eater in the vicinity, often to lethal effect. More than a few human travelers have been discovered with their mouths open, their throats and abdomen pregnant with a cluster of alp-luachara.

HISTORY

The alp-luachara have always been wild, creatures of appetite, parasites. But due to their unusual nature, they were never populous, not even during the Era of the Gilded Rose. Some theorize that the alp-luachara used this mana-rich period to spread their reach, weaving between earth cultures, like a rumor of plague.

The Fifth World changed very little for the alp-luachara, as far as historians are concerned. The fae persisted. As the War of Sorrow raged between royal houses, as others faded into mundanity, as wives and consorts and children died, their lives forfeit in a pointless conflict, the alp-luachara continued to haunt their rivers and streams.

APPEARANCE AND BEHAVIOR

In their newt forms, alp-luachara are, at first glance, virtually indistinguishable from ordinary members of the species, possessing coloration suitable to their immediate environment. Closer examination inevitably reveals two disconcerting traits: the presence of opposable digits and the lamprey-like dentition. Many of the alp-luachara lack eyes entirely, operating entirely via olfactory senses.

The joint-eaters are even uglier in humanoid form. An average alp-luachara is about three-quarters of a meter tall. They possess vestigial wings and wide-webbed fins, prominent gills and horrifically distended bellies. Like the amphibians they often mimic, the alp-luachara use their pale, mottled skin as secondary respiratory surfaces. Despite their appearance, the fae are unsettlingly quick and, true to mythology, deceptively heavy, capable of pinning their victims to the ground without perceptible effort.

Luckily, alp-luachara seem to prefer subterfuge to brute force, and it is only the rare unfortunate that sees a joint-eater in its bipedal shape. Nonetheless, that doesn't make the fae any less dangerous. Once an alp-luachara has entered a creature's digestive system, it is very difficult to extricate. Like other intestinal parasites, their physiology is uniquely suited for enduring the rigors of stomach acid and peristalsis.

Gruesome as that may sound, what's worse is *how* the alp-luachara enters a host. It waits until a victim has fallen asleep before crawling through an available cavity, traditionally the open mouth. However, if that is not available, the alp-luachara will shrink itself and enter a nostril instead, worming through the respiratory system before it finally releases itself into the body. Surprisingly, few have died from this complication. The alp-luachara's epidermal secretions are believed to possess healing properties.

Either way, once the creature has entrenched itself, it will begin gobbling exactly half of whatever enters the stomach. The victim invariably experiences an increase in appetite, a craving for sustenance that escalates with every passing day. Should the host attempt to starve the alp-luachara, the fae inevitably reciprocates by eating its way through the stomach lining.

Members of the Tuatha de Danaan possess a multitude of simple cantrips to deal with such an infestation, but none of these have leaked to the other races yet. For the infected human, the best solution is either supervised surgery or, failing that, mass consumption of raw salt.

A Note on Condition Monitors

Some of the fae in this chapter have variable stats based on their Force. Condition Monitors for these critters are cumbersome collections of multiple equations and nested parenthesis. In the end, they follow the basic format of (Body / 2) + 8 and (Willpower / 2) + 8, but rather than fill this chapter with variations on that equation, we did pre-calculations based on a critter of Force 4. Then all you have to do is look to see if the modifier for Body and Willpower is an even or odd number, then make the adjustments listed on the following table (note that for the purposes of this table zero is an even number modifier).

Force	Adjustment for even modifiers	Adjustment for odd modifiers
1	-3	-4
2	-3	-4
3	No change	-3
4	No change	No change
5	+1	No change
6	+1	-1
7	+2	-1
8	+2	-2
9	+3	-2
10	+3	-3
11	+4	-3
12	+4	-4

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	Edge	Ess
2	4	5	1	3	2	4	3	3	6.0

Condition Monitor (P/S): 9/10
Initiative: 9 + 1D6
Movement: x2/x4/+2
Limits: Physical 3, Mental 3, Social 5
Armor: 0
Skills: Perception 2, Sneaking 6, Unarmed Combat 2
Powers: Concealment (Self), Natural Weapon [Bite, DV 1P, AP —], Parasitic Feeding, Shift (Metahuman Form)

Alp-luachara, humanoid form

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	Edge	Ess
4	3	3	3	3	3	4	1	6.0	6.0

Condition Monitor (P/S): 10/10
Initiative: 7 + 1D6
Movement: x2/x4/+2
Limits: Physical 5, Mental 4, Social 4
Armor: 0
Skills: Clubs 3, Perception 2, Sneaking 2, Survival 2, Tracking 2, Unarmed Combat 2
Powers: Gills, Shift (Lizard Form)

Baobhan sith

Although the baobhan sith have long renounced their ties to the Unseelie Court, few among the Tuatha de Danaan trust them still, and for good reason. During the War of the Sorrow, the White Women fought bitterly at the vanguard, serving as reconnaissance and shock troops, as guerrilla combatants, until at last they inexplicably surrendered, each and every one.

Retribution was bloody. The trial of the baobhan is never spoken of, only whispered, remembered as testament to an uncomfortable truth: that the Seelie Court is only an ideological difference away from their Unseelie kin.

To say that the baobhan were merely slaughtered is to speak a grave understatement. Thousands died horrifically following their unconditional surrender. They were tortured, bled, wrung dry of mana. Worse yet, none of these atrocities were officially recorded, leaving no way to tell exactly how far the Tuatha de Danaan went to satisfy their bloodlust. What is known, however, is that if it were not for the intervention of Lady Brane Deigh's predecessors, the baobhan would have gone entirely extinct.

A day after their salvation, the remnants of the White Women publicly swore themselves to the Seelie Court. Each of the ruling families then bound the baobhan to a separate geas before interleaving the enchantments, creating an insoluble oath to the throne. Yet at the same time, despite everything that eventually happened, one question was never answered:

Why?

Why did the baobhan surrender? Where are the Unseelie? Could it be possible that baobhan were instructed to go deep undercover, to wait, to bide their time until their previous overlords could rise up yet again? But if that is the case, how would the baobhan circumvent the wards that bind them? More importantly, would they permit their own incarceration if they weren't prepared for escape?

These dark thoughts continue to percolate through the Tuatha de Danaan, even after the passing of the Fifth World. Seemingly oblivious to the hostility directed toward them, the baobhan have installed themselves into surprisingly pedestrian roles. These days, they've become seamstresses and maids, cooks and goosemaids, courtiers and hairdressers. Gone is the glamour tied to them, gone is the allure. In its place, an ordinariness that seems temporary, a waiting for something more grand to re-emerge.

APPEARANCE

The baobhan are all heartbreakingly beautiful. Their hair is alternately red or blonde, always long, always glimmering as though spun of sunlight, their skin creamy, their eyes jewel-bright. It isn't a warm beauty, despite the richness of their pigmentation; it is more a silvering of moonlight on the slant of a blade.

Their unearthly splendor is a ruse, however, meant to distract from the fact that the baobhan are predators, vampires that survive on mortal blood. Needless to say, the White Women are exceptionally strong, partially because of the unique nature of their physique. According to myth, the baobhan possess talons and fangs, but the truth of the matter is both simpler and stranger. These unusual race of fae can control their very bones. In other words, they're capable of transforming fingers into skewers, molars into razors. It is a very limited form of shapeshifting, however, requiring that the baobhan pay attention to the distribution of mass or risk collapsing onto themselves.

Though the White Women are predominantly humanoid in appearance, a small subset possess an

odd deformity: cloven hooves and backward-facing knees. It has been suggested that these are the result of interbreeding with satyrs, but neither families of fae have confirmed (or denied) this speculation.

THE BAOBHAN'S KISS

The baobhan are vampiric creatures, and have been since the first memory of their existence. They're capable of deriving sustenance from traditional food sources, possessing an omnivorous palate similar to humans. Their preference, though, is for blood. The reason for this predilection has been discussed endlessly, with the baobhan themselves providing a variety of answers, none of which connect to the next. The most common theory, however, is that blood contains traces of mana, an entirely valid conjecture given the usage of bodily fluids in ritual magic. This hypothesis also provides support for claims that baobahn drain "sexual potency" from their victims, though the mechanism for this is less certain.

Regardless of its motivation, the Baobhan's Kiss is a notorious affliction. Just like in stories, victims grow addicted to feedings, instinctively seeking out the baobhan after their first encounter, over and over, until at last death has overtaken them. It is possible to undo this compulsion, however, either through the usage of magic or through the perpetrator's consent.

A point of interest: Baobhan and their victims are remarkably territorial. Although the baobhan are capable of congregating without violence, any encounter involving a food source invariably results in violence. Curiously, this sense of aggression persists even when the baobhan themselves are not present. If two individuals, both of whom were recently fed on by different members baobhan, meet, an altercation invariably follows.

SOCIETY

The modern baobhan are driven by a peculiar brand of domestic meritocracy. Social status, as far as anyone can tell, is assigned based on their perceived value to society. For example, a successful woodsmith is viewed with greater favor than, say, a distant courtier. Unsurprisingly, the baobhan also pay attention to the width of their personal networks, frequently going out of their way to extend friendships in the strangest direction.

The optimistic see this as a desperate endeavor to redeem themselves after the horrific events of the War of the Sorrow, a way of both compensating for their bloodied diet and the war they fought for the other side. Once again, however, this viewpoint isn't universal. Many believe that there is a hidden agenda behind the baobhan's willingness to tolerate mundanity. After all, this cloying affability is inconsistent with their nature. The baobhan are hunters. *Predators*. Why would they contrive to be so saccharine toward their prey?

Babobhan Sith

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	M	Edge	Ess
4	3	5	3	4	3	4	6	5	3	6

Condition Monitor (P/S): 10/10
Initiative: 9 + 2D6
Movement: x3/x5/+3
Limits: Physical 5, Mental 4, Social 6-10 (depending on Essence)
Armor: 0
Skills: Blades 2, Perception 5, Running 4, Sneaking 6, Tracking 2, Unarmed Combat 4
Powers: Baobhan's Kiss, Dual Natured, Enhanced Senses (Hearing, Sell, Thermographic Vision), Immunity (Age, Pathogens, Toxins), Natural Weapon (Bite: DV 4P, AP -1, Reach -1), Regeneration, Sapience
Weaknesses: Allergy (cold iron, Severe), Allergy (sunlight, Severe), Essence Loss
Notes: Damage from sunlight allergies cannot be healed through Regeneration. Unlike vampires, baobhan sith can eat food besides blood.

Cucui

The crunch of smashed furniture, a looming shadowy beast invades your home while you sleep. Blood red eyes in the gloom, and a hulking shape pouring chaos and destruction into the safest place you know.

The cucui are hulking, armoured brutes who break into homes and destroy anything they can get their hands on. Every cucui used to be a troll, and worse than their looks is the beastial cunning which has destroyed their reason.

It is hard to know what these creatures want. We know that they desperately want to be inside houses, and once they have smashed their way through the door or wall, they start to break anything breakable. The cucui are destructive and terrifying; they will rip their way into a court apartment in the middle of the night while the

household members likely are sleeping, making more noise than a small army. A fae who finds one of these creatures invading their rooms in the dark, a looming shadow breaking furniture and sweeping smaller items onto the floor, will flee into the corridors if they are wise; faeries with a greater presence of mind will gather those important to them to make sure they are out harm's way. Larger households, who may have many servants and guards in their sprawling compounds within the court, are even more chaotic, with guards panicking when a cucui smashes through a wall or window, bypassing carefully guarded gates and doors.

In the cold light of dawn the inhabitants will return to their rooms and try to put their lives back in order. But a pall of horror will lie over the apartment, even after all of the doors are fixed and windows mended. There is no rest in a home that has seen such terror in the night, and sickness will often follow in the wake of the cucui. Charms and talismans will ease the troubles, but it takes a cycle or more for the fear to fade in the household and for people to go about their business without ever-present horror dwelling with them. Those who flee find that their nights are restless and wakeful until they can return to the cursed house and make peace.

The very few who can keep their wits in the darkness and the chaos say that the cucui listen carefully to the noises as they smash things, and that before ripping and tearing soft furnishings, the cucui will run their hands across the cloth as if savoring the feeling. Are these horrifying creatures trying to recapture part of their life? Do they delight in knowing the thing they are breaking? No one has found the answer.

Care seems to be taken by these creatures. They rarely attack more than once in a night, preferring to strike and disappear, to be seen in a distant part of the Court weeks or months later. The few trolls who were regulars at the Court and were recognized after the transformation didn't seem to haunt the same corridors and apartments that they were familiar with in their life. Trolls, though, are relatively rare in the Court, and many that change into cucui become unrecognizable, so it can never be entirely clear if these creatures deliberately avoid the compounds that they once knew or not.

If you are have your wits with you when a cucui invades, and are foolhardy enough to want to stop one, your swift end might be delayed with the knowledge that they are not unstoppable, and they do have flaws in their hardy armor. If given something that used to be important to the former troll, the cucui will sit and stroke or hold it, and will stay that way till they collapse from starvation or dehydration (which will take days). This has happened a few times and has taught us more about these creatures than anything else. The creatures seem pained by bright light—a large fire or magical spell of light can cause them to run off. They will flee from fire, not because they are particularly vulnerable to it, but because the bright light hurts their eyes. A burning brand, if you have one, may keep you alive for a few minutes. Use that time well.

To balance these minor weaknesses, the creatures are strong and durable. Fire hurts their eyes, but it doesn't have much effect on their tough hide, and their long reach and loping gait means they can move quickly and grab an elven swordsman from almost across the room, before escaping down the corridors.

We are not sure how a respectable and intelligent troll becomes a gnarled nightmare, but somewhere well out beyond the borders of the court, trolls go and never come back. It may be some festering disease in hidden hollows, it might be a curse, it might be the way that the realm affects those who are alone. No one has seen it happen, and not many would want to.

We don't know about how they are made, but we do know what happens to them. The former troll gains about a third of a meter in height, mostly in longer, gnarled legs. The normal troll skin deposits grow larger, not as random growths, but in curves that cover the skin on their arms and torso in tight spirals. The spirals harden the skin and make the cucui move more stiffly while also protecting the cucui from anything that might harm it. The process seems as if it would be painful—the troll's tusks and teeth are broken and chipped as if ground and shattered from too much clenching. Staring at the face of a cucui is looking into a gaping mouth of broken glass. Their reason is stripped away, and there are very few shreds of their former personality clinging to them. No one knows how long the transformation process takes, but in the records of the Court, there was one troll who left Morning Hearing with anger and fierce words, striding into the wilderness, and was seen ransacking hamlets three days later, burning passion aflame and reason fled.

Killing a cucui is usually considered to be a kindness to the troll that the creature used to be.

Hunting cucui is difficult. They cower in dark places during the day and stalk the night. They seem attracted to the Court, and find their way in to some of the most private places, smashing doors and walls to get inside.

Once they have entered an apartment, they deliberately break things, starting with any sources of light they can smash. Wood splinters to fragments and glass shatters under their crushing grip. They don't seek out courtiers to do them harm, but they will lash out and crush any who are foolish enough to get in their path. Then they will eat them, adults and children alike.

Cucui

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	Edge	Ess
11	3	4	11	3	1	2	1	3	6

Condition Monitor (P/S): 14/10
Initiative: 6 + 3D6
Movement: x3/x6/+3
Limits: Physical 13, Mental 3, Social 4
Armor: 12
Skills: Perception 2, Sneaking 5, Unarmed Combat 7
Powers: Concealment (Self), Natural Weapon [Fists, DV 12P, AP -3], Parasitic Feeding
Weaknesses: Mute, Phobia (Bright Light)

Croki

The croki are beautiful fae, with an appearance more human than elf, while still retaining that attractive fae glamour. They have an artistic talent and nimble hands, and they are dexterous enough to create intricate origami art in various materials. Many are hired as interior decorators for other fae or great spirits, as some croki's magical talents can even fold the perception of space. This makes them very sought-after in the fashion-conscious Court..

Croki perceive the world around them and other beings as a suitable canvas, media for their arts. They will hire/enslave metahumans to accompany them around like a retinue. The croki may dress their servants up like dolls, or make more permanent physical alterations to show off their talent. Croki retinues can be quite the sight, with ornate tattoos, piercings, and other alterations they may be inspired to make.

One thing about croki is that they all wear white gloves. Emphasis on the "white," though the cut and material can change to their fashion taste. They are somewhat vain about keeping their hands clean. They don't wave or eat food without utensils—they find such practices barbaric. They also don't do handshakes unless it's to seal a deal. Another reason why they wear gloves is that it's a common courtesy, as their touch can easily peel skin from metahuman and fae alike. It's not that they care if they flay a metahuman, but they follow Court protocols over messy displays. This is the darker aspect of the croki. They can manipulate their servants' skin for their art. Once flayed, the victim's skin can be crafted into various magical items. It's been suggested that a croki of great power was able to bind the Al Azif in human skin.

SOCIETY

Croki are not strongly interested in socializing with their own kind. They tend to see each other as competition, not compatriots, and they believe that any time spent with others of their kind only risks exposing their secrets to rivals. Croki also do not have any unified sets of beliefs, so individual beings are more likely to spread out to factions whose interests are aligned with theirs, rather than a group of croki joining a faction en masse. Since they are fashion-conscious, dangerous, and more than willing to participate in intrigue, they are naturally suited to the Court, and at least one croki can be found in every faction, with unaffiliated croki in the Court being actively recruited by those who would like access to their abilities and glamor.

Croki

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	M	Edge	Ess
F	F	F+2	F+2	F	F	F	F	F	F	F

Initiative: [(F x 2) + 2] + 2D6
Astral Initiative: (F x 2) + 3D6
Condition Monitor (for Force 3 and 4): 10/10
Movement: x2/x4/+2
Armor: 0
Skills: Artificing, Assensing, Astral Combat, Gymnastics, Perception, Ritual Spellcasting, Spellcasting
Powers: Astral Form, Aura Masking, Fae Glamour, Flay Touch, Fold Perception, Improved Sense (Smell, Thermal), Materialization, Sapience, Spirit Pact

Doppelgangers

What happens to a *coimeádaí* that has lost its liege? What happens to any mortal that has been cast aside, forgotten, no longer glittering with new potential in the eyes of the Seelie Court? Some believe that is where the doppelgangers come from, that they were extruded from the soul-stuff of these unfortunates, reforged in mana, and made something entirely new.

Few of the Tuatha de Danaan remember a time when the doppelgangers were not part of the courts, and those who do, do not speak of it. For many of the fae, these things simply are the way things are: Silhouettes that do not quite fit, a glimmer of motion in the periphery of one's vision, a word in a different voice, a shadow. By and large, however, they seem harmless enough, which is a fortunate turn of events given their number and their fondness for crowds. No ball in the Seelie Court, no congregation numbering in the tens, is ever without their company.

But what do they do in such gatherings? The simple answer is: nothing at all. The doppelgangers are observers, gliding between conversations. Occasionally, they will stalk a single individual for a time, like a cloak of whispering shadows, an eerie but toothless nuisance. Harmless. Completely and absolutely harmless.

Or are they? The Seelie Court, for all of its elegance, is hardly an innocent place. Much like in the oldest fairy tales, this is a realm of glass-cut beauty, edged, silvered with hemlock. It'd make sense that the inhabitants would bear teeth and claws and weapons more insidious still.

Not that anyone is willing to speak of it. To do so would be to acknowledge a disturbing possibility. But the gossip persists. Here and there, the Court whispers about how a gluttonous lord has suddenly turn sagacious, and how a revered philanthropist might go from saint to sinner. It is always unprecedented, always abrupt, and always preluded by an evening in a crowd, and sightings of the individual amid chittering, gauzy shadows.

Doppelgangers replace people. Those are the words breezing unspoken under the breaths of every courtier and commoner. The doppelgangers are taking people away, and they are remaking themselves in the image of those they've stolen. Yet, if that's true, if that is such a popular opinion, why is this such a buried secret? How come there has not been more clear information, more definitive accusations?

The possibilities are terrifying. First and foremost, all those who have been suspected of being replaced by a doppelganger are inevitably better people. Sure, there's the occasional anomaly, the unfortunate discrepancy, the one in one hundred that goes completely off the rails, but they're far from the status quo. By and large, the suspected changelings improve on the original. More crucially, they're invariably more loyal to the crown.

THE CUCKOO'S CULT

How do you tell a doppelganger from the original? Thousands of methods have sprung up over the millennia, some more nonsensical than others. A dusting of spilled salt lures the doppelganger out of its persona, forcing it to count the fallen grains. A night in the theatre will pull at the creature's ego, forcing it from its seat and onto the stage, dead set on illustrating how a true performer enacts their lines. A heated blade slipped between the toes will force a confession, although the wise will point out that this method will coax a babble of words from just about anyone.

So many answers, but so few that fit.

The Cuckoo's Cult is a shadow organization sworn to the task of deciphering the alleged activities of doppelgangers. Each member is related to someone suspected of being a changeling—a lover, a mother, a son who is unwilling to let go and accept the stranger that now lives in their home. And every single one of them knows better than to speak too loudly of their affiliations. As such, it's hard to say what exactly the Cuckoo's Cult does, whether they're hoping to oust the doppelgangers, or they're simply there to learn. Because of their need for secrecy, the movements lack any central structure, operating in a thousand splintered groups that will occasionally communicate with cryptic messages.

Some of their wisdom has succeeded in leaking through these layers of subterfuge, however. Today, we know that the best way to identify a doppelganger is to pin their shadow with a pane of glass. It is necessary to bisect the shadow; both halves must be completely equal. If that can be accomplished, the shadow will speak, will beg to be reunited, and then you will know the truth.

Worryingly, this technique works.

APPEARANCE AND BEHAVIOR

It is hard to describe the elusive doppelgangers. To many, they're barely more than shadows, a suggestion of motion in the corner of one's eyes. Eyewitnesses that can testify to the contrary are extraordinarily rare.

That said, accounts do exist. According to general consensus, doppelgangers are two-dimensional beings, existing as cartoonish caricatures of human shape. Those with a facility for terrestrial television have compared them to the shadow-puppet versions of the Muppets. In their natural form, doppelgangers have demonstrated no facility at using things such as doorknobs or locks – not that it matters to fae who can drift beneath a door.

Their voices are an echo of whomever is within their vicinity. Should someone present themselves in silence, doppelgangers will adopt that quiet, maintaining a restless stillness until something is spoken. This, along with rumors of hostile takeover, suggest that the fae are a symbiotic species, with the shadow-forms described as a larval stage. Of course, if that is the truth, are the so-called changelings the final stage of their life cycle, or is there more to come?

Doppelgangers

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	M	Edge	Ess
F-2	F	F	F	F+1	F	F+2	F+1	F	F+1	F

Initiative: [(F x 2) + 2] + 2D6
Condition Monitor (for Force 4): 9/11
Movement: x2/x4/+2
Armor: 0
Skills: Assensing, Astral Combat, Con, Counterspelling, Disguise, Forgery, Gymnastics, Palming, Perception, Spellcasting, Sneaking, Tracking
Powers: Astral Form, Compulsion, Materialization, Mimicry, Sapience, Shift (Metahuman Form), Vanishing
Weaknesses: Vulnerability (glass, but only when shadow is bisected)

Kappa

Kappas are Asian fairies who look like child-size humanoids with frog or turtle features, such as webbed feet, shells, or elongated legs. The faces of kappas have some simian features, but most people usually just notice the water-filled depression on top of their heads. This water is said to be source of their powers.

Often thought of as mischievous thanks to the legends about them, kappas are actually congenial and often befriend metahumans. The mischief that they cause are acts of rebellion, usually directed at an individual in order to teach them a lesson or change their behaviors. These efforts are rarely successful in the modern world, but kappa are old spirits and do not learn quickly.

As for the water in the bowls on their heads, the truth about it is still a mystery. When asked, they laugh off the thought of water being their power and usually dip a finger into it and flick it.

SOCIETY

Kappas derive great enjoyment from undermining the pomp and grandeur of the Court. Individual kappas find it very difficult to secure invitations to the Queen's Banquet, as the Queen has seen their kind pull one too many pranks at her gathering. It may seem unfair to blacklist an entire species of fae because of the actions of a few, but the kappas themselves seem to acknowledge that it's a fair cop. Some of them seem intent on finding a way to sneak into the Queen's Banquet without permission to cause further chaos, which seems very much like a recipe for disaster. Kappas are regulars at Trickster's Buffets, so anyone wishing to learn more about their plans might try to chat with some of the creatures they find there.

With their gentle mischievousness and friendliness to metahumans, kappas often gravitate toward the Eclipse and Bastard factions (especially since a kappa is the de facto leader of the latter group), though they have also been known to grant the authority-undermining actions of Hanged Man some much-needed levity.

Kappa

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	M	Edge	Ess
F+5	F	F-1	F+1	F	F	F	F	F	F	F-2

Initiative: [(F x 2) - 1] + 2D6
Astral Initiative: (F x 2) + 3D6
Movement: x2/x4/+1
Condition Monitor (for Force 3 & 4): 13/10
Limits: Physical (F x 4)/3, Mental (F x 4)/3, Social (F x 4)/3
Armor: 0
Skills: Assensing, Astral Combat, Exotic Ranged Weapon (Elemental Attack), Gymnastics, Perception, Unarmed Combat

Powers: Astral Form, Banishing Resistance, Concealment, Confusion, Elemental Attack (Water), Engulf (Water), Fey Glamour, Influence, Materialization, Movement, Sapience, Search, Vanishing

Weaknesses: Allergy (Fire, Severe)

Kayeri

Walk into any forest in Tir na nÓg and listen carefully. There is a chance you may hear the kayeri whisper among themselves, chanting "Mu. Mu. Mu." There are those who believe that all mushrooms are the kayeri, that the agouti and the dragonfly are kayeri or, at the very least, a phase of their enigmatic life cycle. Certainly, it lends well to romanticism. Imagine, humans have said, a creature that begins as a vine, as a glittering insect, but eventually evolves into something bigger than us. What a splendid metaphor!

The Tuatha de Danaan know better. The Seelie Court know the kayeri as ferocious protectors of the forests and the jungles, rarely willing to step foot outside of their birth-lands (which is not to say that they can't be coaxed from their homes). For all of their reclusiveness, the kayeri are universally happy to negotiate with outsiders, particularly if it involves woodland preservation. At least one branch of the royal family boasts of such an alliance and has, in fact, gone so far as to provide the kayeri full access to their personal gardens.

This is not to say that kayeri, or their associates, are not viewed with instinctive suspicion. For all of its glittering formality, its endless balls, its hours of clever poetry and magical performances, the Seelie Court seethes with quiet paranoia, and something like the kayeri can only be viewed as a threat. It is no secret that the mushroom-hatted faerie have no interest in anything but the wild itself. As such, the question remains: When will they turn on their allies?

The War of Sorrows left the kayeri largely untouched, the fae burrowing deep into the soil to hibernate until the violence passed. However, the conflicts caused substantial damage to their birth-lands. Entire swathes of forest and swamp were eradicated during this horrific period. No one has taken responsibility for the destruction as of yet, leaving many to wonder what will happen when the kayeri finally realize who is to blame.

SOCIETY

The kayeri are most commonly found in the Seelie Court acting as either as bodyguards or as members of

a private military. Eager to please, they're remarkably pliant creatures, happy to conform to any order, or to adapt to any situation. Combined with their natural prowess, their facility for traveling through woodland areas with exceptional speed, they make ideal infantry.

When not otherwise working for their employers, the kayeri are inevitably found gamboling in heavy vegetation. Eyewitnesses claim that these fae can communicate with the plants themselves and have been seen accelerating their growth, or resculpting hedges into aesthetically pleasing shapes. What the kayeri actually say to the plant life, however, no one knows.

To date, no one has heard the kayeri communicating with anything but their traditional "Mu" noises. Surprisingly, this hasn't hampered their ability to interact with the rest of the Seelie Court, especially given the ready availability of translators. Those willing to spend mana on something as frivolous as a translation cantrip report that kayeri are astoundingly eloquent, frequently conversing in intricate poetry.

These same people claim that the kayeri are culturally minded, possessing an oral tradition steeped in friendly competition. The fae have engaged in week-long tournaments, where competitors recite long soliloquies or participate in ferocious debate. It's possible that this is how the kayeri assign status within their society.

Unlike some of the other fae, the kayeri are anything but territorial, at least in regards to other members of their species. Travel is free between forests, and it's not uncommon for entire families to share a single patch of green. Only outsiders are required to negotiate access. For another kayeri, the phrase "mi casa es su casa" (my house is your house) is an inviolate truth.

It should be noted that this interspecies friendliness isn't entirely altruistic. The kayeri, to put it delicately, are uncannily virile creatures. Relationships are universally polyamorous, frequently consisting of a single male with two primary females. All three frequently possess secondary partners and will also involve themselves in casual encounters. Any children born of these unions are taken into the protection of whatever partner group spawned them. However, custody isn't set in stone. The kayeri will happily shepherd their young to whichever family proves most competent—or invested—at their care.

APPEARANCE AND BEHAVIOR

Both female and male kayeri are exceptionally tall, standing 2.2 meters in height. Physically, they resemble muscular, bipedal rabbits, although their facial features betray a distinctively hominid cast. Their jaw structures are particularly interesting. Unlike the timid herbivores they are so often compared to, kayeris possess carnivore teeth, similar to those seen on a wolf. As an added point of interest, their dendition not only suggests the ability to rip and tear but also an enormous aptitude for latching onto their quarry.

It is worth noting that the kayeri may have a symbiotic relationship with their mushroom hats, which aren't accessories, but actual fungi growing out of their skulls. Of course, it could simply be a part of their biology. It is not unusual to see the kayeri in a vegetable state, shedding fur and bone, to take on the appearance of giant mushrooms. In fact, some argue that this might be their preferred form.

Whatever the truth, one thing is for sure: the kayeri are dangerous. Their diet is not bovine-exclusive as legend suggests, although they can devour an entire cow in minutes—flesh, hooves, and all. Fortunately, such rapacious behavior is not actually common among the kayeri, who unanimously prefer to keep subterranean existences.

Kayeri

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	M	Edge	Ess
F+1	F-1	F	F+2	F	F	F	F	F	F	F

Initiative: (F x 2) + 2D6
Movement: x3/x5/+3
Condition Monitor (for Force 3 & 4): 10/10
Limits: Physical [(F x 4)+5]/3, Mental (F x 4)/3, Social (F x 4)/3
Armor: 2
Skills: Assensing, Astral Combat, Clubs, Etiquette, Negotiation, Perception, Performance (Storytelling +2), Running, Sneaking, Unarmed Combat
Powers: Armor (2), Concealment, Natural Weapon (Bite, DV (F+3)P, AP -2, Reach —), Sapience, Search
Weaknesses: Allergy (Fire, Severe)

Kishi

The kishi are a recent addition to the courts, and a celebrated one at that. The reason for this is that many see them as a testament to the prowess of the ruling family. According to popular history, Lady Brane Deigh spearheaded their rescue from the African continent, extricating the kishi from the hands of the

megacorporations. Casualties were reportedly high, but the Seelie Court prevailed.

Whether this is actually true is another matter entirely.

The battalion allegedly responsible for this daring mission is nowhere to be seen, and all remaining eyewitnesses belong either to families loyal to the crown or representatives of parliament. Of course, one could ask the kishi themselves, but naturally, no one wants to. Part of this is because they've very quickly developed a reputation for being smooth talkers, silver-tongued and glib, perpetually needling for new contacts.

It's possible that the kishi bear no ill intentions but are simply (if clumsily) attempting to make friends. But some believe they may have more nefarious intent. A growing number of the court believe that the kishi aren't simply looking for a place to hang their cloak, but instead desire to establish themselves in a position of power. Social maneuvering is, of course, not unknown among members of the Seelie Court but as naysayers point out, it's an entirely different matter when you're discussing a species that is literally two-faced.

That said, if the kishi are truly planning a coup, why would Lady Brane not intervene? The answer to *that* question is not one that many enjoy contemplating.

For now, however, most are content to simply watch. Despite the suspicions that follow them, the kishi are scintillating companions, earnest and gregarious, eloquent to the fault. And although their origin stories never quite match, there are a few commonalities.

The kishi were reportedly hit hard by the outbreak of VITAS in Africa, and they hold a public grudge against the local governments for withholding medical attention from vast swathes of the population, a hatred that continues to fester even today. There are rumors that the kishi plan retaliatory action, but to date, such plans have not materialized.

Another point of interest is the kishi's insistence that they did not, in fact, come into existence until the advent of the Sixth World. They claim that their kind were Awakened by the influx of mana, by the conflict that devoured the African content. But that seems deeply improbable. Regional mythology is rife with mention of hyena-faced men. In Angola, the kishi are referred to by name. Naturally, the kishi have taken to repudiating each and every piece of evidence, dismissing them as flagrant lies, the work of copycats and charlatans.

And naturally, no one believes any of this.

APPEARANCE AND BEHAVIOR

The kishi are invariably tall, invariably dark, and always, *always* handsome—at least from the front. It is difficult to pin an ethnicity to them. There are some who resemble the Kongo, some who resemble the Oromo, some who resemble Egyptians, some who resemble Hausa, and so on. The more astute will tell you that while there are some variances, the distribution of ethnicities is similar to the population of Angola, lending credence to the idea that the kishi originated from there (even if they claim otherwise).

From behind, the kishi are equally curious, possessing the heads of hyenas. Interestingly, their animal halves are female rather than male, a fact that has catalyzed speculations about their natural biology. The kishi have provided no comment on the subject. They do, however, happily promote the idea that their hyena-selves possess a herculean grip and enough power to crush steel. None of this has been proven. None of this has even been witnessed. But such assertions have done nothing to stop the kishi from disseminating stories of their brilliance.

It is important to note that the kishi enjoy lying. Rarely do they seem to care when they're caught in their own trickery, laughing themselves into a new fabrication a moment later. The kishi do not seem to have any clear purpose in their deception, other than to see how far they can push an untruth before it is revealed as such, making it very difficult to tell when they are being serious.

A TRADE IN MEMORIES

Unsurprisingly, the kishi's predilection for duplicity has not endeared them to the Seelie Court. However, nobility is nothing if not resourceful. It was quickly discovered that the kishi are, by virtue of their cunning, exceptionally good at facilitating the creation of *coimeádaí*. Part of this can be attributed to the fact that mortals seem to find them irresistible.

It is difficult to say why this is the case, however. Some believe that it's simply that the kishi are preternaturally attractive to humans and metahumans, in the way a hyena might fascinate a newborn antelope. Others attribute their appeal to an aptitude for discreet mind control. (One or two suggest that the hyena-halves drain the mortal souls of will, leaving them perfectly pliant.) Regardless, the kishi possess an enormous gift for the matter and are routinely contracted by members of the Court to seek new vessels.

It helps as well that the kishi are aesthetically minded. Mortals curated by the fae are, just like the fae themselves, universally beautiful specimens. More importantly, the kishi are alarmingly discreet, at least in regards to this matter. Thus far, their customers appear to be nothing but happy. To hire their services, it seems, is to be certain that no news will escape, no strands of gossip will emerge. In exchange, all they ask is the gift of your friendship—or a secret, however small.

Kishi

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	M	Edge	Ess
4	4	5	4	4	5	4	6	4	4	6.0

Initiative: 9 + 1D6
Movement: x2/x4/+2
Condition Monitor: 10/10
Limits: Physical 6, Mental 6, Social 8
Armor: 0
Skills: Alchemy 2, Archery 4, Blades 6, Cracking skill group 3, Con 2, Counterspelling 3, Electronics skill group 2, Enchanting 3, First Aid 2, Gymnastics 2, Intimidation 4, Perception 7, Spellcasting 4, Throwing Weapons 4, Unarmed Combat 5
Powers: Influence, Mimicry, Natural Weapon (Bite, DV 4P, AP —, Reach —), Sapience
Weaknesses: Allergy (Fire, Severe)
Notes: The Bite Natural Weapon only works with the hyena head.

Leshii

Shock troops. Soldiers of misfortune. Conscripts. The leshii are hounds obedient to the hand of the Seelie Court, guided missiles, kept blind and dumb until they are required.

Those who enter the Seelie Court will inevitably cross paths with the leshii. After all, they're hard to miss. For the purpose of intimidation, they're kept massive. Lady Brane Deigh's entourage itself is said to contain at least two leshii at any given point of time.

Although no mortal has ever seen the leshii in action, the Seelie Court's records bristle with mention of the shapeshifting Russian fae. Fantastical diagrams illustrate the depth of their savagery, while text holds an account of their killing. It is possible that the numbers have been exaggerated for effect, a way to subdue any attempts at rebellion. But if they were not? The leshii may well be the Seelie Court's equivalent of a world-shattering nuke.

Now, the question needs to be asked: How did the leshii find themselves enthralled by the Seelie Court? There are many who think that the answers can be found within the library itself, buried between stories of the leshii's strength. Others claim that their exact origins have long been erased, razed to the ground so that no one might learn of the despicable circumstances that led to the enslavement of these fae.

That said, nothing exists in a vacuum. A few rumors have escaped, and they are unsettling, to put it mildly. The most popular tale is likely the most gruesome. In the beginning, before the War of Sorrows, before the fae even needed to contemplate strife, the leshii roamed wherever they will. Like many of their brethren, the leshii found the earthly plane intoxicating, rife with prey and possibility. Drunk on their power, they made themselves into gods, tying their name with humanity's fear of a great adversary. (There is likely a reason as to why most modern descriptions of the Devil involve a surprising number of commonalities with leshii.)

But that soon proved insufficient. What the leshii craved was not worship—they desired challenge. Their blood ran hottest during the pursuit, when they were forced to hunt. Frustrated by humanity's willingness to bow their heads, the leshii changed tactics. Many in the Seelie Court believed that the leshii were the first to kidnap young children and replace them with squalling changelings. At first, this mischief delighted the leshii, who had grown tired of humanity's pliancy. But slowly, they began to realize that mortals were surprisingly willing to overlook discrepancies in their children's personality. The rescue attempts dwindled, and human parents simply learned to adapt to their changelings' needs, dismissing the peculiarities as a trick of hormones.

This left the Seelie Court thronging with young human children, all terrified, all desperate to go home. Not even the best sorcerers could keep them all in thrall simultaneously. Suddenly, the leshii found themselves with thousands of abandoned foundlings and nowhere to put them.

So they ate the children, each and every one of them. The butchery, conducted over the course of a single night, would forever be remembered as the Night of the Starved Rose. When the rulers of the Seelie Court discovered what the leshii had done, they were appalled. Records are unclear as to what happened next, but soon enough, all traces of the original leshii vanished, leaving only the obedient zombies that inhabit the court today.

APPEARANCE AND BEHAVIOR

In general, the leshii are all masculine, all bearded, and all massive. Their skin ripples with moss bark, muscle, and the faintest stink of blood. Horns spiral up from their brows. They are also frequently naked, although few have ever thought to comment on the inappropriateness of the leshii's lack of attire. Their hair is frequently sufficient to disguise their bare bodies. More crucially, to talk about the leshii is to invite the attention of their Keepers, a situation that few are willing to invite.

By and large, the leshii lack any behavioral patterns to learn. They go where they are told. They sit where they are told. They will not even eat unless otherwise instructed. No one has ever heard the fae speak. However, there are a few who claim they have seen the leshii tapping their fingers against wall or wood, drumming out what almost sounds like a coded message.

KEEPER OF THE SILENT ONES

Like all weapons, the leshii require vigilant observation. The Keepers serve this function here. They can be identified by their crimson-laced robes of office, and the golden disc cut into the center of their foreheads. Like their charges, the *coimeádaí* are entirely silent, communicating entirely in gestures with their respective nobles. No one knows for certain how the *coimeádaí* maintain their control over the leshii. As far as anyone is concerned, the Keepers simply remain within the vicinity, saying nothing until they themselves are spoken to. There is no sign of magical equipment. There is no indication of a previously established geas. Nothing but their lithe, quiet presences and that one piece of conspicuous jewelry chiseled into their skulls.

Leshii

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	Edge	Ess
8	4	3	9	2	2	4	2	2	6.0

Initiative: 7 + 1D6
Movement: x2/x4/+2
Condition Monitor: 12/9
Limits: Physical 10, Mental 4, Social 4
Armor: 0
Skills: Blades 5, Clubs 6, Gymnastics 2, Intimidation 3, Perception 2, Unarmed Combat 6
Powers: Sapience, Toughness

Morbi

The morbi do not have a known metaplane of origin, nor are there any mythological references to them. The first mass sighting of morbi on the material plane was August 2017, when many were seen observing mountains in the Pacific Northwest before they erupted. Unsubstantiated stories report sightings as early as 2010. VITAS might have been what initially attracted them to that spot. They have been around the metaplanes for much longer, though, and the archives of the Court record numerous instances where morbi have served as warnings or harbingers of ill tidings.

Morbi have large black eyes in proportion to their grey oval face, and their bodies are ambiguous forms beneath a cloak of something appearing like feathers or moth wings. The eyes do not have discernible metahuman anatomy. Instead they are like dark pools where the surface can ripple and shift in a fluid way. They don't appear to show emotion—or rather, observers don't see a change in their facial expression that can be interpreted as emotion.

They are odd spirits, attracted to disaster and death. They will stand in dark corners or look from a window, anticipating violence, then walk through the carnage, pausing to observe a dying individual's gasp of air. Some may interact with the dying, but only to adjust their hair or straighten a tie. Others may rearrange the scene into possibly a gentle repose or some artistic pattern.

While the Awakened and even the mundane can see morbi when they manifest, spirits have trouble seeing them. It is unclear how they do it, though it may be similar to the capabilities of mentor spirits. In any case, other astral denizens ignore morbi. They seem impartial to our material world, but there are questions on how they know of disastrous events. While there is possibility of divination, some believe that they are mischievous harbingers of chaos, capable of causing events and then watching them unfold. There may be truth in both. While we don't see emotion from morbi, it doesn't appear that they like to be disappointed. There have been correlations of nearby "freak accidents" if there wasn't enough tragedy in the initial event.

SENTIENT OR NOT?

Along with the debate about whether morbi cause chaos or foretell it, the most significant question about the morbi is just how sentient they are. They are excessively uncommunicative, with no reliable records of them having spoken. There have been attempts to teach them sign language, which they have resisted, but they have been known to use gestures—pointing, tugging on sleeves, and so forth—to at least direct attention to some spot or another. Why they want people to look at whatever they want them to look at is another enduring mystery.

These gestures may not indicate any significant intelligence. If, as has been suspected, morbi somehow feed off negative emotion, directing the attention of others to this event may be a simple instinct, the way communal animals indicate the existence of food to one another. This puts the communication at the level of base instinct, not indicative of sentience. However, they can be quite emotionally sophisticated. Anyone can sense despair at the sight of a great battle, but morbi have been seen in all sorts of scenes of emotional distress, from lovers who have just experienced a breakup to children experiencing separation anxiety to faction leaders who had just been betrayed and were on the verge of losing their rank. Again, it is quite possible that their appearance at these scenes is instinctual, responding to a source of food, but some observers say their ability to read these situations, particularly in advance, indicates significant emotional intelligence. The fact that some observers can believe morbi are creatures of mere instinct, others think they are fore tellers of doom and sadness, and still others believe they are master manipulators dedicated to arranging chaos, and each side has considerable evidence to support their theory, speaks to the truly deep mystery that is the morbi.

Morbi

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	M	Edge	Ess
F	F	F+1	F-2	F	F	F+1	F+2	F	F/2	F

Initiative: [(F x 2) +2] + 2D6
Astral Initiative: (F x 2) + 3D6
Condition Monitor (for Force 4): 10/10
Movement: x2/x4/+2
Armor: 0
Skills: Assensing, Astral Combat, Perception, Ritual Spellcasting, Sneaking, Unarmed Combat
Powers: Accident, Astral Form, Banishing Resistance, Enhanced Senses (Low Light), Innate Ritual (Augury), Magic Sense, Materialization, Search
Optional Powers: Deathlock

Pishacha

Carrion-eaters. Flesh-renders. Scavengers. Corpse-movers. There are a million names for pishachas, none of which fit. The Indian fairies, often vilified as demons, followed their people to the West when the trade routes opened and have watched over them since. Theirs was a grisly responsibility; they were the gods of the desperate, the silent, the lost. Those who would harm their charge, pishachas devoured, meat and marrow and all, giving birth to their reputation as evil spirits.

At first, the Seelie Court said nothing. There was no reason, no time. The War of Sorrows was breaking, and brother was taking up arms against brother. But just because nothing was spoken, it did not mean that nothing was remembered, or packaged and put away for future inspection. The conflict ended. Mana returned, seeped through the cracks in the world. And as the Seelie Court found its voice again, it turned to the pishachas and said: Why?

Tensions have always run thick between pishachas and the Seelie Court. The latter found the foreign fae uncouth, too quick to leap to violence, too quick to take the side of those they considered their own. But protocol demanded that the Tuatha de Danaan act with the utmost courtesy and so, they did, smiling tight-lipped even as pishachas darted between planes, blood-soaked and rage-kissed.

All changed, however, when VITAS ripped through India. Suddenly, the pishachas had an enemy that they could not touch, let alone fight. Hundreds died. Then thousands. Millions. The devastation tore at the pishacha core, and the Seelie Court saw an opening.

Adapt or leave. The ultimatum was clear. To everyone's surprise, pishachas chose compliance, relinquishing their bloodied history with an ease that unnerved. Everything they were, they discarded. Those unwilling to bend their knee to Lady Brane Deigh's command vanished without a trace. So quick was their disappearance—and so thorough—that many feared it

was a case of foul play. The remaining pishachas were quick to reassure: No, their kin had merely gone away.

Today, the fairies have integrated entirely in the Seelie Court, primarily functioning as servitors and bodyguards, protectors of the sumptuously powerful. It is a role that has incensed some. How dare the noble class act the way they have? How dare they subjugate them? After all that has happened? Surely, this was gross exploitation, especially given the alternatives. Surely, this was wrong. But that anthem of fury is not one echoed by the fairies themselves. Instead, there is only silence, only watching.

APPEARANCE AND BEHAVIOR

Pishachas are ugly. Pot-bellied, sharp-toothed, dark skin tumescent with veins, eyes webbed with red. The exact features can and will vary from pishacha to pishacha. Some are enormous monstrosities, more than three meters in height, scaled and ridged with horns. Others are closer to human, smaller and sleeker, but no less horrific to witness. Of course, even those descriptions are only viable half the time. Pishachas are gifted shapeshifters, capable of seamlessly switching between bodies.

But there is one thing that all pishachas share: the eyes. Look closely, regardless of what form they might have taken, and you'll see concentric rings, as though the optical tissues were built of layers upon layers. Pishachas do not have true irises, merely circles in a deeper shade. None of this helps or hinders the fae, who enjoy relatively good vision.

Their dentition is of particular interest as well. Even if pishachas had attempted subterfuge, they would not have been able to disguise the nature of their beings. They are clearly carnivores, suited toward tearing meat and crushing bone. Their dietary capabilities reflect these powerful jaws. Pishachas can eat anything. Metal, stone, chips of glass—none of these frighten them. It is simply a question of time before the object is ground down and left to undulate through the digestive tract.

Despite their monstrous appearance, pishachas have remarkably gregarious personalities. They are happy to converse for long hours, or to shoulder any responsibility. Their considerable strength and shapeshifting skills make even the most arduous of labors into a mild inconvenience. Many pishachas are remarkably well-spoken as well, leaving many to wonder why they would enter into such derogatory, dehumanizing roles. When asked, the fae invariably reply with the same thing: We're waiting.

PISHACHAS AND THE DEAD

The dead speak to pishachas, or at least that is what they claim. Pishachas have always been open about their beliefs that the deceased do not vanish into nothingness but rather transition along the reincarnation cycle. But not everyone leaves for the next life.

Every pishacha has their "chosen" families, a bloodline they've guarded since its conception. It is their duty to protect the family, their scions, and their wives. If a member of this family dies an unnatural death, it becomes a pishacha's duty to seek justice, or to put the dead to rest—a process that involves consuming the remains. (This, perhaps, is where legends of pishachas' preference for cremation grounds emerged.)

That said, pishachas possess a strong reverence for the dead, regardless of whether they belong to the fae's chosen household or not. It is not uncommon to find them tending to grave sites, carefully cultivating the terrain, assembling offerings, and other such labors. This deep-set respect can and will override whatever loyalties they might offer to their employers. More than one noble has met a gruesome end because of their unwillingness to compromise.

Pishacha

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	M	Edge	Ess
5	2	3	6	3	2	5	1	3	2	6.0

Initiative: 8 + 1D6
Movement: x2/x4/+1
Condition Monitor: 11/10
Limits: Physical 7, Mental 4, Social 4
Armor: 1
Skills: Animal Handling 3, Intimidation 4, Unarmed Combat 5
Powers: Armor (1), Devouring, Natural Weapon (Bite, DV 8P, AP -1, Reach —), Sapience

Pukwudgie

If there is one thing that you need to know about pukwudgies, it is this: They are angry.

Many point to their rage as evidence of the belief that the Seelie Court should maintain its distance from the earthly plane. This is poison, they hiss, even as pukwudgies rattle in their centuries-old fury, too full of hate to speak for themselves.

To understand pukwudgies' predicament, however, we must examine their history. Before the War of Sorrows, before the death of mana, before any of today's atrocities took place, the grey-skinned faerie shared a warm friendship with the Wampanoag. There was friction in the beginning, of course, as pukwudgies learned to adapt to mortal concerns. But learned they did, and, pukwudgies found a home among the tribes.

Their peace was short-lived, or at least short-lived in the eyes of creatures who would endure for centuries, nursing the trauma of their loss. One year, an epidemic began convulsing through the Wampanoag, swallowing entire swathes of families. Countless died as pukwudgies watched helplessly, too slow to stop the infection. Time had never been an issue for the fae. But now it was, and things were happening faster than the pukwudgies knew to deal with.

Paralysed by horror, the pukwudgies did nothing even as the events that would cut through the Wampanoag took place. By the time that the faeries had organized enough to respond, their friends stood at the edge of extinction. There was nothing left to be done. The pukwudgies fled, ashamed.

But they did not surrender their hurt, nor did they give up their guilt. Instead, they nursed it, year after year, rolling the memory of their failure in their hearts. The pukwudgies grew bitter. With themselves, with humanity, with the fact that the Seelie Court had done nothing, had merely shrugged and declared this was not a matter of them. The misfortunes of the Wampanoag were not the Seelie Court's problem. They were inconsequential.

This did not go over well with the pukwudgies. After another decade or so of self-loathing, they pulled together and walked out of the Seelie Court. But they did not go far. In fact, they stayed quite close indeed, organizing hostile incursions into the territory of those who had abandoned them. Fortunately for the pukwudgies, their assault was an inconvenience at most, an inconvenience to be tolerated even as the War of Sorrows raged on. By and large, the Seelie Court had worse things to worry about.

Eventually the war ended, leaving the court to rebuild. And in that new silence, the survivors found themselves asking: what do they do with pukwudgies now? There didn't appear to be room for discourse or to renegotiate reconciliation. Trapped in their own grief, the fae continued their assault, unable to find any recourse outside of pain.

APPEARANCE AND BEHAVIOR

For beings of such immense power, pukwudgies are exceptionally cute. Take a normal human being and condense them to about two, maybe three feet of height. Remove their pigmentation. Let their skin grow grey and bright. Magnify their feet, their fingers, and their ears. Once you've done that, you'll have the prototypical pukwudgie.

Move closer, however, and the fae lose their endearing quality. Every pukwudgie in recent history is branded by an incomprehensible amount of grief, their countenances mangled by the weight of that burden. Eyewitnesses state that the fae practice ritual scarification as well, and that the pukwudgie are all living records of their sins. But no one knows for certain. Few survive a close encounter with the pukwudgie, as they have been reduced to nothing but beings of pure emotion.

Needless to say, they were not always like this. Records suggest that pukwudgies were once a tribal people who practiced a matrifocal society. The oldest females were responsible for stewardship of their respective tribes, but each family unit was obedient to both the oldest male and female within the bloodline. However, while power was held by the oldest, pukwudgies as a whole believed strenuously in democracy. Any significant decision, whether marriage or a call to arms, had to first pass through every level of the social hierarchy. Ordinarily, this would not be a problem. Pukwudgies were powerful creatures, capable of taking care of themselves while they waited. But the same did not prove true for the Wampanoag, who suffered grievously while the pukwudgies deliberated over the idea of extending their help.

By the time the Sixth World came around, pukwudgies abandoned their complex ideas of government and opted instead for pure anarchy. In an ironic twist, this proved the best decision the species could have made. Because they lacked organization, no one

saw pukwudgies as a threat. Because they ceased communicating between themselves, there was no way to identify a ringleader, to follow one tribe to the rest. The madness, however unintentional, kept them safe.

POWER OF THE PUKWUDGIES

As mentioned earlier, pukwudgies are almost disproportionately powerful entities, especially given their comical appearance. A number of abilities have come to be associated with the fae. On the most unimpressive end of the scale, all pukwudgies are capable of transforming into porcupines or, at the very least, altering hair follicles into spines. It is also believed that the fae can dematerialize at will, create fire, and utilize poison arrows. Although potentially dangerous, none of these talents are terrifying, per se. Compared to the outlandish cantrips that are frequently seen in the Court, they seem almost mundane.

So, why do pukwudgies have such a fearsome reputation? For one, none of them seem to evidence a fear for murder. If anything, they seem to thrive on carnage, on perpetuating the agony that beats in their chest. More crucially, however, pukwudgies appear to have a limitless facility for controlling the dead. Any of the dead. Stories abound of pukwudgies calling up fallen soldiers and turning them on their masters, or of pukwudgies strutting ahead of an entire army of corpses.

Pukwudgies

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	M	Edge	Ess
4	4	5	4	4	5	4	6	4	4	6.0

Initiative: 9 + 1D6
Movement: x2/x4/+2
Condition Monitor: 10/10
Limits: Physical 6, Mental 6, Social 8
Armor: 0
Skills: Archery 5, Blades 3, Con 2, First Aid 3, Gymnastics 4, Intimidation 4, Leadership 2, Negotiation 3, Perception 5, Spellcasting 3, Throwing Weapons 2, Unarmed Combat 5
Powers: Innate Spell (Flamethrower), Materialization, Natural Weapon (Spines, DV 6P, AP -1, Reach 1), Sapience, Venom
Notes: Pukwudgies often use the venom they create to coat arrows that they use in attacks.

Tommyknockers

Tommyknockers are an integral part of English mythology, as inseparable from the continent as the Irish are from their leprechauns. Some pieces of popular lore describe them to be the spirits of dead miners, forgotten in the catacombs, alone except for the worms and the men who would come after, hungry for the gold that'd taken their forebears' lives. Still others believe that the tommyknockers are entities of their own, elves and fae instead of the spirits of the dead.

Whatever the case, there's something that everyone can agree upon: Not all tommyknockers are cut from the same cloth. In some stories, they are benevolent forces who warn miners of cave-ins before they happen. In others, they are malevolent entities, swallowed by the dark, so starved by loneliness that they'd do anything whatsoever to bring a new voice, a new face to their subterranean tombs.

Because of this incongruity, many miners learned to be careful and to listen for that ra-ta-ta-ta-ta of the tommyknockers' hammers on the wall.

Legend isn't always very far from fact.

Real tommyknockers are a varied bunch. Some are as murderous as myth prescribes, but most are merely impish, enjoying the terror that they incite in human miners. However, mischief doesn't define them. Industry does. More than anything else, tommyknockers are hard workers who enjoy labor for all that represents. During the War of Sorrow, they worked tirelessly in the terrestrial plane, digging deep into the earth for new metals, new answers to the ongoing conflict. Too clumsy to be blacksmiths, they committed themselves to that search, crawling so deeply into the soil that some of them never emerged again, blending into seams of metal.

This, of course, did not endear them to everyone. For one, the tommyknockers were willing to perform this labor for anyone. Two rival families might contract the same team. There would be no difference to the gnomish creatures, no loyalty to anything but work and payment. When the war ended, many began questioning the Seelie Court's willingness to simply let the tommyknockers be. Were they certain that the tommyknockers were a neutral party? Did they genuinely believe that no harm was meant? What if the tommyknockers encouraged the violence? What if they seeded doubt and dissent, all to fulfill some malicious quota?

This unexpected bigotry was one of the reasons that a vast majority of tommyknockers remained on the earthly plane, risking oblivion in exchange for peace. And slowly, as decades began to past, many grew to believe that the tommyknockers had gone extinct entirely.

It wasn't until Lady Brane Deigh came into power that this belief was reversed. The Seelie Court's new ruler brought the tommyknockers out of obscurity, opening doors and offering the beleaguered fae a place of honor in their halls. All is forgiven, all is forgotten.

Of course, that wasn't necessarily the right thing to say. The tommyknockers, all truth be told, hadn't committed any crime. They were impartial, but they weren't impartial in the right way. Like so many survivors from the war, the tommyknockers were treated unfairly. And like many of the survivors, they said nothing—they merely kept their council and watched.

Today, the tommyknockers appear to have been restored to their old roles. Once again, they are in the mines, working for the betterment of the crown, searching for new resources and artifacts that might have been forgotten in the earth. Naturally, their proximity to such tangible articles of power has made them of interest to the megacorporations. More than a few companies have sent representatives to woo the tommyknockers, hoping to be able to find the right kind of bribe to pull the fae to their side. So far, no one has succeeded.

Yet.

APPEARANCE AND BEHAVIOR

The tommyknockers look exactly like what legend ascribes to them: dwarfish men with torrential beards, noticeably inhuman but not misshapen. Again, they bear strong similarities to leprechauns, although there is one prominent difference. Where the leprechauns are often spry and quick, the tommyknockers are *burly*. They are strong enough to hold a tunnel in place, strong enough to crack rocks with their hands. For all of their diminutiveness, a tommyknocker can easily wrestle a grown bear to the ground. This makes them slightly comical to look at. They're essentially bricks of muscle, perambulatory slabs of raw power nestled in a fountain of curly hair.

But for all of their apparent bulk, the tommyknockers are uncannily malleable. Detractors have called them rat-like in the past, and it isn't a poor comparison. These Cornish fae can squeeze through almost any opening, flattening in the ribs in a way that is absolutely horrific to witness. Their maneuverability, of course, makes mischief incredibly easy.

Though they are, without a shadow of a doubt, hard workers, the tommyknockers are also ridiculously mischievous critters. In the nineteenth century, they developed a reputation among humans for stealing tools and replacing equipment with stranger objects, and for tracking frightened miners through the depths of the mines and then laughing into their ears. Oh, the tommyknockers—most of them, at least—never intended any harm, but they caused more than a few deaths, casualties of play taken too far.

But that isn't what detractors have pointed fingers at. No. What will not die is stories of what the tommyknockers do with these deaths. It is widely known that the tommyknockers are universally male. However, unlike so many other uni-gender fae, the Tommyknockers do not procure human partners to create new additions to their species. In fact, no one knows how they reproduce at all—outside of that one, nasty rumor. The rumor that says that tommyknockers are grown from the ribs of dead men, sprouting like mushrooms in the cold, damp dark, fully grown with a hammer on their hands.

Tommyknocker

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	M	Edge	Ess
6	3	2	10	5	3	5	4	4	3	6.0

Initiative: 7 + 1D6
Movement: x2/x4/+1
Condition Monitor: 11/11
Limits: Physical 10, Mental 6, Social 7
Armor: 1
Skills: Blades 5 (Axe +2), Clubs 3, Escape Artist 9, Gymnastics 6, Unarmed Combat 4
Powers: Armor (1), Innate Spell (Phantasm), Malleability, Sapience, Toughness, Tunnel
Weaknesses: Allergy (Fire, Severe)

Will o' the Wisp

A flickering light around a bend in the corridor. Who could be here at this time of night?

Many of the people of the Seelie Court are unusual, and most are secretive. One of the most shy and secret creatures is the elusive will-o'-the-wisp. Even though dozens, or even hundreds of wisps live in and around the Court, most residents have not encountered one, and even fewer have seen the true shape of the creature.

The oldest book of faerie lore in Court archives, *Observations of the Fae*, is one of the few books that describes them at all. The book describes will-o'-the-wisps as small goblin creatures who can hide better than most can see, and who often carry a lantern when they need to attract the attention of others.

More information can be deduced through reason. Obviously these creatures are shy and normally choose to stay aloof from faerie business, but they are often found in the Court corridors, and when seen are usually to be found at the scene of some great intrigue or deception. The one thing about will-o'-the-wisps that everyone knows is that if you follow their light, you might be led to some great treasure, some great secret, or into great harm. In the politics that suffuse the Court, it is obvious that they have some goals that overcome their shyness. Unwilling to simply talk to people, they will instead spy on dirty deeds and listen to whispered treachery, and if their goals will be served by bringing the secret to light, they will lead an unsuspecting patsy or catspaw to evidence that can uncover the plot. It seems that Court players who please the wisps occasionally come into great wealth, seemingly by luck. Conversely, those who displease them are led into danger. Worse luck, no one other than other wisps seem to have any idea what they want.

Physically, wisps are small goblinoid creatures, who use their inherent magic to bumble through the air, but most creatures never lay eyes on their true form. Instead, they use their magical powers to conceal their true faces. Only the keenest eyes can see through the concealment, and they never drop the illusion. In those rare moments when they want to interact with someone, they carry a lantern, or conjure a magical light and use that to signal, beckon and gesture. The specific type of light seems to be a matter of personal taste; sometimes they will carry a lamp the size of their head, other times they will carry a single candle. In most cases it doesn't matter how big the light is as long as it can be seen around the corner of a corridor and is visible enough to lead an unwary fae on a journey of discovery.

Being shy creatures, they must live in isolated and remote areas of the court, but their curiosity leads them to wander through the more populous areas.

Wisps often spy on other faeries, but even though they are very hard to see, they won't linger in a room in which a plot is occurring or a body is being hidden; instead, they will carefully observe who comes and goes, and deduce what's happened from the physical evidence, as well as the words and actions of people when they leave. They are then in a position to lead a curious individual into a room full of clues if they want the plot discovered.

When not plotting for themselves, they seem to be fascinated by innocent people, and people who can still innocently enjoy a game. They frequently frolic and play near children, visitors, and others who have not fallen prey to cynicism and guile. They will often cluster near a baby taken from the mortal realm, although of course they will snuff their flames if caught by someone who looks to be unfriendly to their fun.

Many residents don't know the truth behind will-o'-the-wisp, and love the idea of being led on an adventure to discover some dread secret, or some marvelous reward. More knowledgeable schemers and power brokers regard them as a downright nuisance, and they take care to obscure their dealings, even when it looks like there is no one around. This may be one reason that schemers often speak in obscure metaphors and vague allusions.

They definitely seem to have some sort of organization, on the few occasions when one has been hurt, other will-o'-the-wisp exact infuriating revenge, exposing secrets, or other frustrating tactics. This organization doesn't extend to a power structure and is probably more of an informal gossip network.

Will-o'-the-wisps are drawn to areas with interesting background counts, even when the background emotions are too faint to interfere with magic. They will cluster around areas that have had intense emotions, and they seem to especially cluster around areas that have had some event burn an impression in astral space, even if that impression was fleeting. This leads them to places where foul deeds have been done in secret, where forbidden lovers tryst, and where great secrets have been hidden.

In the past, nobles of the Court have made common cause with will-o'-the-wisps when an astral impression

has been the only clue to some plot or event, but most of the time the court ignores these enigmatic creatures, and leaves them to play among the empty outer hallways. In any case, only very powerful and knowledgeable fae seem to know how to communicate with them, and those who do know aren't telling.

Will-o'-the-Wisp

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	M	Edge	Ess
1	6	8	1	4	5	5	4	6	1	6

Initiative: 13 + 1D6
Movement: x2/x4/+2
Condition Monitor (P/S): 9/10
Limits: Physical 4, Mental 7, Social 6
Armor: 0
Skills: Assensing 5, Escape Artist 4, Flight 6, Navigation 3, Palming 4, Perception 6, Performance (Dancing) 3, Running 5, Sneaking 6, Tracking 4
Powers: Accident, Compulsion (Follow the Light), Concealment (Self), Dual Natured, Enhanced Senses (Astral Senses), Flight, Innate Spells (Improved Invisibility, Light), Sapience

New Critter Powers and Weaknesses

BAOBHAN'S KISS

Type: P Action: Complex
Range: Touch **Duration:** Instant
Unlike Essence Drain, Baobhan's Kiss is directly tied to consuming blood from a victim. The emotional connection of Essence Drain is not needed. This means that unlike Essence Drain, the effect of the Baobhan's Kiss is not permanent, and it does not strengthen the critter. The attack does 6P damage (resisted with Body only, not armor) as well as one temporary point of Essence loss. This loss heals in twenty-four hours. While the Kiss is not as harmful as attacks from vampires and other Infected, it can be addictive. Each time a character receives a Baobhan's Kiss, they must treat it as if they used a drug with an Addiction Rating of 6 and an Addiction Threshold of 3. The addiction is psychological.

MALLEABILITY

Type: P Action: Complex
Range: Self **Duration:** Sustained
The critter can make itself very flexible, compressing muscles and even bending bone to pass through tight spaces. The critter receives +2 on any Escape Artist tests to escape manacles or similar confines, +4 to slip through tight spaces. They can also slip through spaces they would seem too wide to be able to pass through—they can attempt to go through openings as little as one-quarter of their actual body width.

PARASITIC FEEDING

Type: P Action: Special
Range: Special **Duration:** Sustained
Parasitic Feeding allows critters to tap into the food source another creature uses and siphon it off as their own. This takes continued effort from the critter with this power; treat them as a toxin with a Vector of Ingestion, Speed of 1 day, Penetration of -2, and Power of 16. The effect is that victims must increase their lifestyle costs by twenty-five percent or have their Body temporarily reduced by 2. The reduction ends when the parasite is expelled or the lifestyle cost is increased for long enough for the victim to reduce the Power of the toxin to 0.

The Daily Troubles

When existence stretches into eternities, memories are misty and sometimes conflicting, and reality itself is pliable to those who know how to shape it, grudges and feuds can be buried deeper than ancient skeletons. But they are never forgotten. The denizens of the Court and the related areas plot against each other out of reflex. It is bred in their bone, or whatever passes for their bodily structure, to joust for position, to act against their enemies, and to consolidate power. Asking what their ultimate goals are can be like asking a tree just what shape it intends to take by digging its roots deep into the soil. The tree grows because that is what it is supposed to do, and it takes the shape it is able to take. So it is with the factions of the Court.

Here, then, are some of the ways the branches of intrigue are reaching through the Court—sometimes with a clear sense of what it is they are attempting to grasp, sometimes not.

The Unseelie Court and Its Allies

The reactionary nature of the Unseelie Court is right there in its name. From the beginning, they have defined themselves by what they are not. Insofar as they have defined themselves at all. There are still many members of the Court who insist that the Unseelie Court is nothing more than a rumor, a bogeyman that naïve people like to blame for a collection of random events. They are the devil of the Seelie Court, the easy thing to blame so that you don't have to analyze events too closely.

The Unseelie Court, if they exist, take advantage of their mysterious nature. They never directly take credit for actions that are connected to them. They have no one that will admit membership to their body, so no one can tie actions to the Court. Any operatives they have possess other allegiances, and they can claim that any activities they undertake are related to those ties, and not to any connections they have to the Unseelie Court, which, incidentally, they are not part of, because they could not be part of it, because it is not a thing that exists.

The best way to examine the Unseelie Court, then, is to examine those thought to be part of it or allied to it. All of them, of course, will deny any knowledge of anything discussed herein.

Friends in Strange Places

Niall O'Connor

Officially, Niall O'Connor is a noble in County Roscommon of Tír na nÓg, and he also holds a low-work management position in Renraku Éireann-Tír. As one of the influential Danaan Families, O'Connor is part of the ruling structure of the Tír. That position has never fit comfortably on him, though, as he has had difficulties with authority in general and other members of the ruling families in particular. He is that type of revolutionary who sees himself as a patriot, doing what is best for his country by overthrowing the incompetent and/or malevolent government that restrains its greatness. He is also gifted at covering his tracks, as the only concrete anti-Tír activities to which he can be tied are the delivery of certain speeches, attendance at various rallies, and donations to grassroots organizations seeking to decentralize power in the Tír. All the other stories told about him are rumor and conjecture.

These rumors say that O'Connor is one of the most frequent travelers between the Seelie Court and the earthly Tír. Long before the opening of the new passageway to the Court, O'Connor knew well how to make the journey to those realms. How he received

an invitation to the Court and how it has never been rescinded are ongoing mysteries, but O'Connor is a regular presence at Seelie Court formal occasions. Many functionaries vocally oppose his regular presence, believing the allegations of his anti-Court activities are strong enough to justify his permanent banishment, but either the ruling officials do not agree to this point of view or they are powerless to keep him away. O'Connor is a mage of considerable ability, well steeped in the Paths and Ways that carry so much influence in the Court, so it is quite possible that the powers of the Court have decided it is not worth the considerable effort it would take to keep him away.

O'Connor, the stories say, operates very much in the traditions of the Court, only he attempts to turn its operations on itself. So when the Court is hosting emissaries from another metaplane with the intention of using its denizens to further the efforts of the Tír, O'Connor is whispering in their ear about the gains they could have allying with the Tír's enemies. When representatives of the Court are searching for valuable magical artifacts to strengthen the Ways, O'Connor is designing counterfeits to fool them or planting false information to send seekers on long and aimless chases (or even, if he is feeling particularly malevolent, chases that bring seekers face to face with a vengeful croki or other pesky spirit). At least half the members of the Court have been reputed to be his spies at one point or another, which at minimum creates an air of mistrust that O'Connor is quite pleased with.

O'Connor is unfailingly polite, eloquent, and treats his opponents with a kind of pitying condescension, where he tries to hide his sorrow that they are not as enlightened as he is.

Emperor Hak-Jin

Hak-Jin is always introduced as an emperor, and is always addressed as His Imperial Highness. No one in the Court, however, knows anything about the empire to which he is attached. Since he is a tall, haughty figure, with long, black hair over a red silk robe, and his mouth habitually stretches into a rictus grin, very few people feel comfortable approaching him about anything, let alone asking where his supposed empire lies. He travels with an impressive retinue, generally consisting of several jiangshi, and the sight of them approaching in hopping unison is often enough to send chills down anyone's spine.

Given that Hak-Jin is closed-mouthed about any associations he might have, tying him to the Unseelie Court requires circumstantial evidence, but that has been continually mounting against the emperor. He or his retinue seem to have a knack for being in the proximity of things that go wrong for the Court. He was the last person seen near the quarters of Eclipse faction leader Stillikin Croft before her unfortunate passing, he was noted as asking about the Crown of Cortez shortly before its mysterious disappearance, and perhaps most ominously, there were reports of creatures wrapped in white cloth hopping away from the Yellowstone underground as the mana rift was exploding outward.

The emperor cannot, of course, be directly tied to any of these events, but the common thread of his appearance has multiple Court observers convinced that he is an Unseelie operative. As a result, interactions between the emperor and Niall O'Connor will be closely scrutinized in upcoming Court events.

Communicating with the Emperor Hak-Jin

The emperor is not the the most loquacious of conversationalists, and the jiangshi are quite wordless. This makes communication with him difficult, which seems to be the way he prefers it. Like many Court nobles, though, the emperor also travels with a few servitors, and they are the best ways to give him information. Typically, he has a female in a green robe that is used for incoming information, and a male in a blue robe that holds outgoing information.

As might be expected, Hak-Jin is terse and [illegible] in his messages, and he has little patie[illegible] excess of language or messages that cann[illegible] at a point. If you want to leave a mes[illegible] on the servitor, make it direct and t[illegible] still does not guarantee a po[illegible] greatly increases the chanc[illegible] be read.

Riva Dhillon

Mention the name of Riva Dhillon to ten different people in the Court and you will hear ten different opinions. However, trace the thread of three or four of those opinions, and you will find a connection to the Unseelie Court. Dhillon is a croki, whose white gloves cover an acid touch and pursed lips conceal an acid tongue. She has a biting word to say about everyone in the Court, including herself. To some, this is as far as her activities go, and there have always been members of the Court who affect a distant contempt for everything around them as a sort of fashionable pose. To them, Dhillon is simply a particularly skilled and witty inheritor of this tradition. Others see a more nefarious intent behind her verbal barbs. They note that her most poisonous insults tend to circulate rapidly around the Court, and that the targets quickly suffer a loss of stature. By many accounts, the low status of the Comet faction in the Court is connected to Dhillon referring to their consigliere, Presswine Cull, as "a piece of floating dust that can do nothing more than aspire to become lint." Life in the Court is, of course, far too complicated to have events shaped by a single insult, but Dhillon at the very least has a talent for knowing how affairs in the Court are shifting and how to give people moving toward various precipices a nice solid shove.

It is very possible, though, that she is more than a bellwether. The insults she delivers in public are thought by some to be simply the visible part of the iceberg, with other machinations taking place out of sight. Quite a bit out of sight, in fact—if she is doing anything besides unleashing her wit on people of the Court, participants are mystified as to what that would be. The few handlers she has are dedicated to preparing her food and keeping undesirable people away from her; neither she nor they are known to take the sorts of back-room meetings that make the Court move forward. No one has any indication that she is possessed of any extraordinary, or even better-than-average, magical or physical skills. She has fingers that can burn skin (or whatever passes for skin among the members of the Court), but acid burns are quite rare in the Court, and no one can recall seeing Dhillon with so much as a glove removed. Yet she continues on her path, unleashing words that shake the standing of Court luminaries, and time and again those people are allies of the Court or dignitaries within the Court's structure. It is perhaps inevitable that allegations of an Unseelie allegiance would follow her activities, but the truth of those allegations is insubstantial. Which fits, of course, exactly in line with the way the Unseelie Court does essentially everything.

The Nightwatch Phantom

The Emperor Hak-Jin is a regular part of Court activities. Similarly, Riva Dhillon can easily be found at most Court functions, dressed in blue-grey and slinging barbs in her low voice that carries across the castle. While they have their eccentricities, they also have certain reliability and, of course, corporeality, about their activities. But the Unseelie Court would not be what it is—whatever that may be—if it did not also have mystery, unpredictability, and the ongoing threat of terror.

For these purposes, there is the Nightwatch Phantom. The fortress that is home to the Seelie Court has many floors—often ten, occasionally eleven, sometimes as many as twelve. Whatever the top floor may be, there will always be a narrow stone staircase tucked behind a room packed with rusted shields and pieces of armor. That stairway leads to the roof of the fortress, a grand affair where each component part of the structure, no matter where it may be placed on a particular day, can be accessed. A stone wall rises a meter from the roof, providing a guard against falling as well as protection should enemy assailants take it in mind to fire something in an upwards direction. There are parts of the roof that are peaked, many flat stretches, a few skylights, and even a dome or two. All of this gives variety to the surface. At night—whenever night decides to fall, and however long it lasts—there is always fog, blowing past even if you cannot feel a breeze. It is uneven and patchy, concealing everything for several meters one moment, then providing a window of clarity the next. It is within these gaps and concealing mists that the Nightwatch Phantom walks.

As a being that exists in night and shadows, the Phantom is not easy to describe. He leaves impressions of fire and dark metal, thudding footfalls, and creaks and groans that might come from his armor or might come from deep in his chest. His motions are slow and deliberate, but he still manages to outpace anyone by disappearing and reappearing at will. He may have a face, he may have something that passes for skin, but even those who have seen him multiple times cannot say for sure.

What everyone can describe is the feeling of dread he brings. That is the first harbinger of his coming. You stand in the nighttime mist, and the wind blows an extra-cold cloud by your face that scrapes your neck and runs a chill down to the base of your spine. Your knees wobble for no good reason, and you hear scraping that is not rhythmic enough to be footsteps but keeps repeating and seems to be coming closer, approaching from every direction. Your head starts to turn, watching, looking, dizzying you with each turn, until you start to see glimpses of orange in the grey dark. You start to expect them, to see them grow more distinct, when suddenly he is there, with a creak like stone being splintered by ice, his sword rises and sucks the darkness into it, you brace yourself for a blow knowing there is no way you can prepare enough, and then he is gone, and it is quiet again, at least for a few seconds, until you hear a creak or a thud and you feel nerves in your forehead and hands fray and wither. And if for some reason you go to the ramparts repeatedly, watch night after night until you become accustomed to his ways and are able to not flinch when he aims a blow at you, then he will change tactics, change appearances, or simply not appear at all. He will choose whatever actions best serve to set you on edge.

With all this, though, it seems difficult to connect a being of fear to the activities of the Unseelie Court. Everyone believes the Nightwatch Phantom exists, everyone knows what kind of night he favors, but disagreement about his activities is severe. There are those who claim the only damage he inflicts is mental and emotional, as there are no accounts of the Phantom directly attacking anyone. There are, however, bodies that have been found on the rooftop, cut with a hundred wounds, and other deceased beings found at the base of the fortress walls or stuffed into chimneys. There is no direct evidence linking the Phantom to these deaths, but there is over-abundant speculation. When there is a fearsome being known to carry a large blade in a particular location, and people are found stabbed somewhere in the vicinity of that location, forging the links connecting the two things is not difficult.

These assaults are not especially numerous, though, and no common linkage between the bodies was established. On top of that, it is not easy to determine when the Phantom first appeared, as Court records of legends and mysteries is uncertain (though, of course, Court records in general are less than perfect). Spirits have long been reputed to move along the rooftop, but spirits move along essentially every area of the castle. And it is a sad fact of Court life that uncovering mysterious corpses is not the most unusual occurrence in the Court, despite the general aversion to violence, so knowing which bodies may be tied to the Phantom and which are victims of other courtiers is exceptionally tricky.

But untangling difficult affairs is the specialty of one of the Court's deputy inquisitors, the esteemed Ashokasundari Rai, and the Phantom has become something of an obsession for her. She has been obsessively researching every unsolved death in the Court from the last decade (and in the course of her work has uncovered a few deaths that seem to have been forgotten) and developed a list of those most likely killed by the Nightwatch Phantom. Her top three victims are as follows:

- **Henbow Thistle,** man-at-arms for Lamane Omar Joof of Eclipse. Thistle was a frequent visitor to the Court and apparently had encountered the Phantom multiple times in the course of his duties, as one night he was seen in one of the smaller barrooms of the Court loudly proclaiming his utter lack of fear in confronting the Phantom. His last known words were "And I would say that to his face!", upon which he staggered out of the bar and headed for the roof. He was not seen alive again and was found the next morning on the roof, with his own sword shoved down his throat. While the Phantom's involvement cannot be fully confirmed, the timing of it certainly makes the Phantom the likeliest assailant. There are many familiar with Thistle's confrontational nature who cast no aspersions on the Phantom for the assault.
- **Caratina Biss**, daughter of Staylily Biss, a sage of the Magician sect. Caratina was reportedly seeking a quiet moment on the roof of the Court with a paramour when the Phantom occurred. The other woman ran to safety, thinking Caratina was with her, only to realize she had been left behind. Caratina was not seen for another hour, when her body was found on the ground near the Court's main entrance. She had many small wounds, described by one observer as looking "as if she had been pecked by a flock of crows." No other being, living or deceased, was known to be on the roof at the time.
- **Pugswort Strikeneedle**, retired doorward with the Cardozo family of the Higher Powers. Though retired, Strikeneedle enjoyed the occasional trip to the Court to meet old friends and reminisce. What Strikeneedle failed to realize was that in his time as doorward, he had alienated a number of Court members, and some of them decided to take their revenge on him during his last visit. A cry of help and some magical confusion led to Strikeneedle wandering through the Court in the middle of the night and finding his way to the Tower of Doubt on a cold, windy night. Many believe that the temperatures were more severe than his frail constitution could handle, and his body was found the next morning, frozen stiff. The temperature does not, however, account for the fact that he was entirely drained of blood, though no wound could be found.

It does not take an observer of Ashokasundari Rai's considerable powers to note that Strikeneedle, Biss, and Thistle all came from factions typically allied with Court officials. Though none of these victims could accurately be described as high-powered, it is well known that common Court practice involves misdirection, giving important duties to those who seem important, and who might be entirely unaware of the role they are playing in a larger scheme. Naturally, no faction would disclose if this were the case with any of these three individuals, so all that exists is speculation, which is a difficult basis for a theory of linked murders.

Ashokasundari Rai needs more evidence, and she intends to get it. She has stated she has at least four potential sources that could shed considerable light on the case: the spirits of the departed victims and the Phantom itself. How she intends to contact any of these is unclear, but her determination will keep her active in finding a way until she is successful. Of course, if the Phantom is truly doing the work of the Unseelie Court, then Rai's efforts will meet strong but subtle opposition. And perhaps the intervention of the Phantom.

Gallows on the Pyramid

Perhaps the most significant adjustment Sixth World powers have to make when moving to the affairs of the Court are understanding the various currencies involved. In particular, the devalued importance of currency often takes many of them aback, as they struggle with the idea that they cannot buy and sell people at their whim. They also have to deal with decreased name recognition—they cannot just walk into the Court and say, for example, "I'm from Saeder-Krupp" and expect people to be impressed.

Some corporations and other organizations have had the advantage of being involved in Court affairs for a number of years, taking the time to learn how influence in the Court works, how the society is structured, and what they need to do in order to be truly impressive.

One such organization is Aztechnology. Aztechnology is well recognized for its public relations genius, and one of their specialties is adaptability. They are skilled at presenting messages that fit with people's culture and preferences, showing themselves as something that is familiar and that belongs, rather than something different, alien, and threatening. This means that when their representatives first visited the Court many years ago, they realized two things. First, that the imperiousness with which they sometimes present themselves would not fly there, and some degree of subtlety and humility, however galling that might be, was called for. Second, they knew the name "Aztechnology" would carry no weight in the Court. The word play that works so well in the Sixth World carries no weight with the fae. So the PR people did their thing, conducted research without people knowing they were doing it, and they selected a name—Coatepetl, the name of an ancient Aztec temple that meant "snake mountain." That is the name they are known by in the Court, which means if you ask around about Aztechnology, you will get blank stares. If you go to the Court, listen for the name, and you will know to whom it refers.

Coatepetl has had many years to build up relationships in the Court, so they are well past the awkward phase of trying to feel out what the different factions are about and who they want to ally with. They are in the more advanced stages of Court intrigue—betraying their previous allies while exploring new partnerships that might be more profitable.

Initially, and perhaps unsurprisingly, Coatepetl allied itself with the stable factions of the Court—the leaders,

the Higher Power faction, and so forth. They had little difficulty seeing that there was significant power and perhaps great wealth tied to the leaders, so they played the game of the current power structure and played it well. Court stories say that many of the artifacts that made their way to the material plane a number of years ago were directly tied to Coatepetl's maneuvering in the Court. Either they managed to hunt them out from the darkest recesses of the Court's catacombs, or nearly forgotten artifacts were brought out and returned to use in response to the dangers posed by the artifacts Coatepetl had moved forward.

While this period brought about some useful gains for Coatepetl, they eventually came to the same conclusion megacorporations tend to settle on at some point or another: Gains achieved in partnership with others are more diluted than gains realized on your own. Coatepetl wants to take steps to a higher point of the ladder of Court power, and they believe they cannot do that under the current structure. Which means they are intent on building a new one.

They have arrived at the same dilemma the Unseelie Court has faced for perhaps forever, as far as we know, and that is, how do you engage in revolution without conquest?

The answer is tied to the reason such a question can be asked in the first place, and that is that the seat of the Seelie Court's power is not easy to ascertain. In the material world, sources of power are easier to trace, and thus the methods of obtaining them become clear, if not always simple. A monarch has the power to govern the affairs of a nation; convince enough highly placed individuals to recognize you as monarch, and that is what you will be, regardless of your blood lines. Similarly, the CEO of any corporation is appointed by a board of directors, so you must convince that group that you will serve their interests and the interests of the corporation to become CEO. Wealth in the material world is equivalent to power, so if you want someone's power, then you might endeavor to acquire a portion of their wealth by whatever means are at your disposal. If you want to rule a physical location, then muster enough armed forces to take that location from whomever would resist you, then reap the benefits tied to that spot.

The Court, though, is a challenge, because while some individual members certainly aspire to greater material gains, as a whole there are many beings of spirit and other insubstantial substances who care nothing for money and the privileges it brings. Coatepetl has had to play a new kind of game, though their experiences on the material plane have not been entirely without use. In fact, they have benefitted from one aspect of their experience that parallels the Seelie Court. Like the Court, Coatepetl have a nation that they use to advance some of their ambitions. And also like the Court, they have seen that money is useful when building up a nation, but by itself it does not develop the sort of full-throated loyalty needed to make a vibrant nation. While Aztlan is seen by corporate observers as a mere subsidiary of Aztechnology, and not even its most important one, the lessons Aztechnology has learned in maintaining it have played a critical role in Coatepetl's activities.

The most useful lesson they brought into the Seelie Court was the notion that any being, including faeries with inhumanly long lifespans, wants to feel like they are involved in building a legacy, constructing something that will be remembered for years, decades, or centuries. They want, simply put, to feel like they're important.

When dealing with the fae, the difficult part is untangling precisely what they need in order to feel valuable and important. Rank and title are part of it, but there is more. The Seelie Court has often prospered thanks not just to its connections to Tír na nÓg, but also because of its devotions to the Ways, and to the idea that the advancement of the Ways will be of eventual benefit to beings across all modes of existence—and that those who do not benefit from the Ways are beings that probably should not benefit from anything anyway. The Unseelie Court, on the other hand, has benefitted from portraying the Seelie Court and its allies as overly controlling, enemies of freedom, too willing to control those who do not agree with it (portraying yourself as an ally of freedom has long been a popular way to rally people to your cause, which is why you will often see groups with diametrically opposed beliefs both claiming to promote true freedom).

In order to oppose the Seelie Court, Coatepetl needed a cause that might inspire members of the Court, while also making themselves distinct from the Unseelie Court. They put all of their public relations expertise to work, and while they did not share the results of their work with anyone outside of their inner circle, the results they came up with can be divined by watching their ongoing activities.

Perhaps the most notable of these activities is Coatepetl's courtship of the Hanged Man. The Hanged Man has traditionally lacked allies within the Court, as they are stuck on a stubborn, seemingly empty path.

Occasionally their embrace of chaos brings them into alliance with the Unseelie Court of the Death faction, but the Hanged Man generally lacks a willingness to carry an extended plan through to the end. After all, if members of the faction had an interest in long-term, carefully detailed plans, they would not have been Hanged Men in the first place.

Coatepetl has been clearly courting the Hanged Man, and careful spy work has shed light on some aspects of this ongoing conversation. Oddly enough, Coatepetl has been very undemanding in the negotiations. They have asked for very little and offered much. Magical knowledge, obscure formulae, extremely rare reagents—reportedly, the Hanged Man has reaped a considerable windfall in magical goods and services from Coatepetl's newfound friendliness. What the Hanged Man has given in return seems minor in comparison. Initially, Coatepetl hoped to gain insight into the Hanged Man's activities and plans, but they did not understand the depth of the Hanged Man's commitment to chaos. Plans are not something they have an interest in generating—simply put, they cannot share what they do not themselves have. Once they understood that fact, Coatepetl knew they needed to change tactics. They became friendly enough with some members of the faction to be able to observe them in action, which gave them a better understanding of how the Hanged Man operates.

Simply put, the Hanged Man watches and waits, and when they see an opportunity to cause chaos, they act. The traits, powers, and items they value are the ones that allow flexibility and immediate action. This is why the faction has very little skilled ritual magic practitioners but is heavily loaded with experts in illusion and manipulation spells. The only real way to anticipate what the Hanged Man might do is to be embedded with them, to see how they act and when they respond. In short, to learn to think like them.

That, then, is the current result of this partnership—Coatepetl is gaining an increasing education in the ways of generating chaos. Their public rhetoric has recently taken on an anti-authoritarian bent. When given a chance to speak at Morning Hearings, they frequently refer to "stifling" rules and the Queen's "domineering" tendency. They complain about the limits put on courtiers, and how it stifles their creativity. In short, they have settled on a freedom-based narrative, because they understand that one of the things fae treasure the most is freedom from anyone or anything that might attempt to control them. They are learning the Hanged Man's sense of disorder, and they will be trying to convince other courtiers that the chaos they intend to cause will be for their benefit. What they do in the wake of that chaos is anyone's guess, though the Queen and her consorts have no desire to let events run that far out of their control.

Masks Behind Masks

The Seelie Court has trees and other plants growing in its halls and great rooms. Sometimes these plants appear overnight, or they experience periods of rapid growth that change the building in occasionally significant ways. There are courtiers who change shape from day to day, those who gain rank and prestige, and those who lose it. There are magical warps and eddies that flow through the Court and change the food courtiers are eating, the music that is playing, or other pieces of the fabric of the Court. Yet amid all this unpredictability and instability, the Court has an order and a process that it follows. Regardless of the changes that happen from day to day, the ranking board remains in place, telling factions at a glance how the leaders of the Court view their power relative to each other. In formal Court proceedings, factions are called on in order of their ranking, and they address Court officials in the forms of address that have been established through the ages. At Court balls and other social gatherings, attendees wear some signifier of their faction allegiance (though decoding these symbols is not always a simple activity). There is an order and predictability—which makes something that might undermine that order and overturn that predictability matters that are very much in the interests of many courtiers.

One major element of predictability is the number and nature of Court factions. With cards from the deck of shadows materializing around the metaplanes at an accelerating rate, much attention has been focused on the tarot and its connections to the Court factions. And with this focus, a simple connection is repeatedly remarked upon: there are twenty-two major arcana in the tarot deck, but only ten acknowledged factions in the Court. What, people whisper, does this mean? What might be happening out of the sight and awareness of many courtiers?

More traditionally minded courtiers downplay this connection, sniffing that the Court is not ordered after the tarot, but rather the tarot is ordered after the Court. This is the type of explanation that lacks the virtue of

actually making anything more clear. Regardless of what came first, the tarot or the factions, why do the numbers not match?

Discussions of the so-called "missing" factions is a popular parlor game in the Court, even if older and more tradition-bound courtiers dismiss such speculation as frivolous nonsense. The speculation attacks the question from all angles—were there more factions at some former time that have disappeared? Are there factions that might emerge in the future? And perhaps most interestingly, are their secret factions in operation now, not following the protocols of the Court while pursuing an unknown agenda?

Elements such as evidence or proof are in short supply in these discussions, which is of course how it should be. What kind of self-respecting secret organization goes about leaving concrete traces of their activities? This lack of proof makes it tempting to dismiss this talk as the Court elders do, as idle nothings, but nevertheless the conversations continue. Something about the subject continues to intrigue Court members, and perhaps that something is a whiff of the truth.

With that said, here are some of the most persistent rumors in the Court regarding the missing factions.

Shadows

If there is a hidden faction operating in parallel with the known factions, many courtiers believe it is the Shadows. It would be quite fitting—this arcana is associated with what you don't see and what you don't know, the hidden dangers and opportunities that shape your destiny. The common belief among courtiers is that the Shadow faction has a low-level presence in the Court because it focuses its activities on the material plane. Shadows are, of course, of critical importance in the material world, the locations where activities that cannot happen in the light of day take place, activities that are of questionable legality but high necessity to keep the world moving forward. And there is a whole legion of people, a veritable army of considerable skill, that carries these activities out. Manipulating these shadowrunners to carry out the business of the Shadows faction would be no difficult task, as the system in which they function is designed to keep considerable knowledge about the full ramifications of what they are doing away from them. Dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of shadowrunners across the world could be carrying out the work of Shadows without knowing it. All the faction would need are some well-connected fixers with access to considerable financial resources, and they could have runners across the globe at their beck and call.

Recent speculation in the Court says that the Shadows faction is responsible for opening the new connection between the Seelie Court and the material plane. There is logical appeal to this argument—if the Shadows faction already has access to a network of shadowrunners, sending them to the Court would be an excellent way for them to bring their abilities to the more spirit-based realm. If they have made this aggressive move to further their own ends, the natural question to ask next is: What are those ends?

This is the point where speculation about Shadows, which was not exactly on firm footing to begin with, becomes even looser and less affiliated with anything approaching known facts. When associations are made, it is tied to the type of factions whose preferred actions most resemble Shadows' reputed activities. Hanged Man and Death, with their affection for chaos and rejection of established orders, seem likely candidates as allies (and in a similar vein, Aes Sidhe Banrigh would be a staunch opponent). Eclipse would be another possible ally—their openness to the world beyond the Seelie Court would mesh well with Shadows' reputed activities in the material world.

Another potential ally that has raised some eyebrows is Higher Power. This is not an immediately intuitive reaction, as the mannered orderliness of Higher Power seems diametrically opposed to the willful chaos of Hanged Man, but the considerable worldly wealth of Higher Power means that should they wish, they are more than capable of funding a wide number and variety of shadow operations. Why they would wish to do so and what ends they would be pursuing remains an open question.

The single most Shadows-obsessed member of the Court is Chambray Cliff, a retired loremaster with the Hermit faction. Due to his faction's leanings, when he speaks of Shadows, it is with distaste, as he believes they are too firmly enmeshed in the affairs of the material world and engaged in conduct unbecoming the Court. His primary motivation in researching supposed Shadow lore is to convince other faction leaders that Shadow does, in fact, exist, and that they should be actively engaged in rooting out all with Shadow connections and removing them from any association with the Court. Conversation with Cliff can be challenging, as he seems incapable of sharing a single fact without also relating any facts connected to it. Demonstrate patience, though, and you might find your way to knowledge no one else has.

Chambray Cliff on Shadows

"Of course they exist. It fits with everything we know about the Court. It fits with my experience there. You cannot walk around the Court without feeling as if there is something deliberately staying just out of sight, teasing you from the many shadows. How can we assume the shadows are not fully inhabited, and who better to inhabit them than Shadows?

"I almost hesitate to look too closely at them when I remember how light chases shadow away, but then I remember that's not how it works—shadows simply shift, they do not disappear. I will keep chasing them as they keep eluding me, and I will be as happy as a dog chasing its own tail, but equally amazed if my futile effort somehow turns to success."

Vigilante

When people in the Court discuss the possibility of the existence of the Shadows faction, it is often with a certain excitement, the thrill of something secret and hidden actually being real. When they discuss the possibility of the existence of the Vigilante faction, it is with sideways glances and nervous whispers. No one in the Court wants them to be real, but every time a grudge is settled in in bloody fashion, the whispers recur, and people worry that what happened was not the normal course of revenge—it was vengeance made formal.

There are many suppositions about why the Vigilante faction inspires such nervousness. One common theory is that every member of the Court is well aware of the many misdeeds they have committed, and they know that if a Vigilante faction becomes a serious presence in the Court, they will reap a harvest they had hoped to put off for many more years, or perhaps forever. Other worries, though, are not as personal. Court historian Ember Limestone is firmly of the opinion that there once was a Vigilante faction, and it played an important role in the Court for many centuries. At some point, perhaps five hundred years ago, perhaps more, it was forcibly disbanded because other members of the Court were tired of living with a sword of Damocles perpetually hanging over their head. Vengeance delayed is vengeance denied, they decided, so they did everything

in their power to delay it. The faction was dismantled as thoroughly as they could, buried into the mists of time.

Things at the Court may stay buried for centuries or even millennia, but very few things stay buried forever. If the Vigilante faction returns its vengeance will be horrible, especially against those who might have been involved in its initial dismantling. In any normal organizational structure, five-hundred-year-old grudges generally cannot have a personal angle to them, but this is the Court—it is very possible for some of the individuals who were involved in the banishment of Vigilante, if that was indeed a thing that happened, to still be active in the Court. Naturally, on the top of that list is the queen herself, Lady Brane Deigh. The time of the commencement of her reign is not clear, and the various decisions of her administration have not been recorded. If she wanted something forgotten, she could bury it, and perhaps even hide it from herself. That is to say, it is quite possible that she could deny knowing anything about the dissolution of the Vigilante faction, and every test of her truthfulness could show that she as being absolutely honest, but she could still be lying. If you do not think that she would willingly alter her memories for what she believed was the good of the Court, then you do not yet fully understand Lady Deigh.

She is not the only leader of the Court with a memory stretching back over eons. Perhaps the best source for information about Vigilante, if they ever were a going concern, is the Queen in Exile, Lady Thisbe Sorrel. The conventional means of making an appointment with her can be used—stand in the great hall, write your name and the subject you wish to discuss on a small card, then gently toss it in the air. If it ascends and disappears, your request for a conversation has been accepted; if it falls to the floor, it has not. You do not, of course, receive a clear time when Lady Sorrel will greet you; you serve the queen's schedule, not the other way around. At some point, though, she will find you, or have you brought to her, and if you are diplomatic and remember to honor her claimed position as exiled queen of the Court, you may have a productive conversation. Just remember that once it is done, you will face a considerable task in unraveling what she has said and separating the threads of truth, lies, and delusion. In that respect, it is not so different from any other conversation within the Court.

The Lost Suit

Many civilizations fall prey to a variety of conspiracy theories, but amidst all the smaller, run-of-the-mill conspiracies, there is often a handful of larger ones, sweeping theories about powers behind powers, about the secret societies and what not that truly control the world. The Illuminati, the Knights Templar, the Elders of Zion, the New World Order, the continuation of Babylon long after the civilization supposedly fell—these are all examples of stories that have been told of secret orders operating just out of sight, pulling the strings of civilization and working toward their own nefarious ends with a complete lack of transparency or accountability.

The Seelie Court has existed long enough that attempting to track its age in years or seasons might be a meaningless exercise. It has experienced odd twists and turns that no one expected when they happened, and few people have been able to explain regardless of how much time has passed. It has stubbornly refused to follow predictable patterns or linear models of growth or progress. It changes, mutates, alters its shape and conduct according to whims that may belong to fate, or perhaps are the expression of some sentient will that is more mysterious and subtle than most courtiers can understand.

There are those in the Court who believe there is a system of powers beneath the powers we see, operations that are out of sight to all but those in the inner circles. If you were to join these inner circles, then the senseless would become sensible. You would understand how the meandering course of the Court makes sense, how all movement is progress toward a larger goal. You would see, and you would understand, and the seeming randomness of the world would fade away like fog pierced by a warm summer sun. You would *know*, and glory would be in the knowledge.

What is this secret power? As has been mentioned before, factions in the Court follow the major arcana of the tarot deck (or the major arcana follow the factions, whichever). Some factions build on this parallel, using tarot (especially Sixth World Tarot cards, if they can get their hands on them) to assist in building their plans and forecasting their future. Remember than in the tarot, the major arcana are trumps, acting in parallel with four suits—Batons, Blades, Coins, and Cups in the Court's version of tarot. In a Court-centric tarot reading, the meaning of the major arcana is always tied

to its associated faction. Minor arcana are somewhat looser, representing the many figures who are regulars in the Court and who are not tied to any one faction. Indeed, these people often have multiple alliances, playing roles for multiple factions when certain causes fall into alignment, then shifting away from some of those roles as allegiances drift. The leaders of the factions understand the importance of having the influence of each suit in their sphere. Batons represents creativity and will; Blades is generally thought to symbolize reason, though there is an undoubted aspect of violence to it; Coins is the material world and the wealth that runs it; Cups are emotions. All of those are important aspects for the factions to consider, and each of them needs all of those elements represented in their activities.

But the four suits do not cover every aspect of existence. Instinct, for example, fits somewhat into Batons and Cups, but is not fully comfortable in either. Making connections and recognizing patterns has some overlaps with the reason aspect of Blades, but also some intuition involved that make it separate. These sorts of things are enough to encourage discussion of whether there could be other suits that reflect reality in more detail. And if there is another suit, how does it play out in the Court? Are there people with traits and inclinations that are not well reflected in the existing patterns, so attempts to read them invariably go astray? What information is missing that diviners of the Court really should know?

At present, this is as far as the discussion goes, but the reappearance of so many tarot cards in the world has given a boost to curiosity. If the cards are floating around, perhaps it is worthwhile to examine as many as possible to find what other suits, if any, might exist. At the very least, this has fueled a strong desire among many courtiers to acquire and analyze as many cards as possible.

Lost and Found

While we are on the subject of searching for tarot cards thought to be lost, we should note that this is part of one of the most enduring functions of the Court—the search for objects of power. This search has several odd aspects to it. The first is that some of the objects sought by courtiers were items imbued with power or enhanced by Court members themselves. That is to say, many items have at one point been in possession of someone in the Court, but due to the intervention of other Court members or the vagaries of the environment around them, they have been lost. Another odd aspect is that there are some items that are the subject of stories and legends, but their function, if any, remains unclear. People have been told repeatedly that these items are interesting, and they have heard that from sources they trust, so they have joined the search. They are eager to find something that they often have no idea how to use when they find it. But the search goes on regardless.

Another interesting aspect of the search for artifacts is that some of them could well be found within the Court itself. While that sounds like it might simplify things, it does not. The Court is vast and ever-changing, and it has a disturbing propensity to generate new dangers in locations thought to be benign. For this reason, many experienced artifact hunters place artifacts that are likely in the Court low on their list of things to find, reasoning that if they have not been found yet, it must be because they are extremely well hidden and wrapped up in dangers that the hunters would rather not encounter. They opt for the relative safety of the untamed wilds beyond the Court.

Artifact hunting is popular among the new arrivals at the Court for the simple reason that it as an activity with results that directly transfer to their world. The right discovery could be the big score they dream of, the one that sets them up for life. Even if they don't ascend to undreamed-of wealth, they might gain power that could help them in their business, both in the Court and away from it.

Below are some of the objects that have aroused interest recently, as well as some of the hunters who might prove stiff competition in the quest for artifacts.

Bragi's Harp

The name of the Norse god of poetry, Bragi, suffers from a bit of a chicken-and-egg problem, as it is similar to the Norse word for poetry, *bragr*. The question is, was poetry named for the god, or the god for the poetry? The answer is lost in the mists of time, but when it comes to Bragi's harp, what is important is that it is associated with both the god and with poetry, and is said to live up to both associations.

The knowns about the harp are clear—it makes the player exceedingly compelling, with people of all ages and musical inclinations unable to turn away from any performance they give. In some legends, the gifts go beyond performance, and it is believed that simply carrying the harp, or even having used it recently, greatly increases one's power of persuasion.

Beyond that lies disagreement. Some descriptors show the harp to be made of wood, while others say it's gold, possibly on the theory that anything of significant power must be made of precious materials. Some depictions make it a larger harp, the type of instrument that one would have to sit down to use; others show it much smaller, easily cradled in one arm and played with the other. Sometimes the carving of the harp is exquisitely ornamented; in other depictions it is plain. There are those artifact hunters who make it a point to play each and every harp they encounter, just in case it's the most valuable harp on the metaplanes in disguise.

Most people believe the harp is not found anywhere near the Court, simply because legends state it has been there before and made the possessors of it persuasive beyond even the considerable abilities of elite courtiers. The notable Court visitor Titania—yes, *that* Titania—brought the harp to Court once and nearly walked away with the crown, until she decided she did not want it. As was stated before, courtiers have a long memory, so those who remember what Titania did with the harp might be responsible for ensuring that the object was sent a very long way away from them.

Drifting Peter

Drifting Peter is a spirt who lacks the ability to materialize, or at very least lacks the will do ever d properly. That leaves him perpetually immaterial. He attends many Court banquets and never eats; he has b witness to many lusts of the flesh but has never indulged.

Lacking the ability to indulge in the most common lusts of the flesh has forced Drifting Peter to be creative, and he has come up with a way of his own—interviewing willing mages. While he occasionally pays Awakened individuals simply to see what their aura feels like, he is most interested in the auras of magic artifacts, which has left him as one of the Court's most aggressive artifact hunters. Within limitations—for example, he cannot pick up artifacts himself, and making his way to underground chambers can be challeng has trouble gleaning information from books, but he is extremely dedicated to person-to-spiri someone in the Court knows something about an artifact, odds are Peter knows it too, especiall skilled at eavesdropping on conversations he is not supposed to hear. Given that he needs help artifacts he treasures, he is certainly open to hiring help, and is an excellent resource for an looking for information on artifacts.

Babr-e Bayan

At first glance, the properties of the magical armor of the Persian hero Rostam known as the Babr-e Bayan would not seem to be worth the fuss it has caused. This is not to say the item lacks power; it is said to be invulnerable to a wide range of elements, along with delivering excellent protection against conventional blows. Those are valuable things for armor to do—so valuable, as a matter of a fact, that there are a number of ways, involving Sixth World technology, magical effects, and even critter pelts to gain a similarly high degree of protection. A good combination of magic and technology—or exceptional applications of one or the other—can provide protection on par with what Babr-e Bayan is reputed to provide, without the hassle of having to track the item down. Yet many factions are still looking for this particular set of armor, which raises a simple question: Why? The answer is most likely tied to what it is supposed to be made of, rather than what it does.

There are many legends explaining the armor's origin, most of them tied to some beast or another slain by Rostam. One story mentions a tiger, another a leopard, while a third identifies the animal as a lion. Another story, though, takes the animal entirely out of the realm of great cats by identifying it as a dragon. This is the element that gets people's attention, because while dragon scales can certainly provide excellent protection, that is far from the only capabilities they possess. The most important, in the eyes of many, is their former physical attachment to a dragon and the possibilities that brings. That means that research connected to Babr-e Bayan is connected as much to what dragon it might have come from as it is to where the item might be right now. Most researchers believe it is from a dragon not known in the current Sixth World, though there are arguments as to whether the dragon died in some past age or simply hasn't awakened yet. There are dozens of different ideas of how the scales—if that's what the armor is, in fact, made of—to make some connection to this mysterious dragon. Some think the armor might help wake up the dragon; others think it might be used as bait to draw the dragon's wrath. Of course, that means the intended use of the armor varies greatly from person to person, as some people might want to possess it, and others want it in the hands of their rivals. That adds an interesting twist to the hunt for the artifact, as two factions could be eager for the armor to end up in a particular place for very different reasons.

Brazen Heads

This is, to put it lightly, a very odd category. There was a time when animated brass heads were highly sought after, as they were believed to relate knowledge no mere human could possess, particularly knowledge of the future. There are several mentions of brazen heads in writings of the European Renaissance.

That fact brings us to one of the oddities of the world and its progression of knowledge. In the Renaissance, there often was little distinction between what came to be considered as sciences and what was later interpreted as pseudo-science. So a noted scholar like Roger Bacon, for example, did important work on linguistics

and gunpowder, while also spending significant time researching alchemy and astrology. Once the Age of Reason dawned, philosophers were left to lament the time Bacon spent on insignificant activities like alchemy, but then the world continued turning, the Sixth World dawned, and before long major universities across the world were once again combining science and magic. Oxford itself has an alchemical branch of its material sciences department, a spot in which Roger Bacon would have no doubt felt very comfortable.

All that is to say what seemed like the follies of the past may have actually contained valuable insights into the ebb and flow of the manasphere and its relation to the rest of the world. Stories of talking brazen heads, which had been dismissed as mere superstition for years, thus take on a renewed interest.

Brazen heads seemed to be associated with many thirteenth-century philosophers. According to one legend, Albertus Magnus had a quite talkative specimen, which was destroyed by Magnus' student Thomas Aquinas for being overly disruptive. The abilities and information communicated by the heads varies; in some stories, they only answer "yes" or "no" to direct questions, while other tales have them being quite loquacious, though only on certain days of the week. Sometimes the heads have communicated arcane knowledge, such as how to build other items similar to themselves; other times they have shared information about the future.

This ends up being part of the problem—the inconsistencies in the accounts of the brazen heads make it very difficult to tell just what energies these objects might have been channeling, or if they were in fact doing anything at all. *Don Quixote* features a mechanical brazen head used deceitfully, and it is neither the first not only place where doubts about the actual magical power of such items appear.

Even if the items are magical, just what are they? The most likely explanation is that they are an inanimate vessel for some spirit or another, in which case there would be strong interest in what spirits were caught in those confines, whether it was voluntary or involuntary confinement, and if they are still there. Discovering the spirit that might have been animating these brazen heads would help determine if there was some genuine divining occurring with these heads, or if the spirits were practicing the same sort of people-reading skills that charlatan mystics practiced before (and after) the Awakening. If it was, in fact, a spirit communicating with the material plane, it indicates a level of pre-Awakening spirit interaction that would surprise many scholars, though if such things were happening, the Seelie Court would be a very likely vehicle for making those connections. Understanding why this interaction took place and who was behind it is an item of interest to many factions, thus making the search for brazen heads a common item of discussion (and action) within the Court.

Yata no Kagami

According to Japanese mythology, Amaterasu, goddess of the sun, is the ancestor of the Japanese emperors. After one of those world-endangering events that are known to happen in mythology, Amaterasu gave three artifacts to the first emperor to keep the world in order until she returned to rule in person. One of these artifacts was the sacred mirror known as Yata no Kagami. It is through this lens that Amaterasu would one day return.

The mirror was stored in the Shinto shrine of Ise, inaccessible to anyone but kannushi who care for the shrine. One of the oddities about the shrine is the whole structure is dismantled and rebuilt every twenty years, with the last occurrence happening in 2073. This rebuilding came with an unnerving announcement by the kannushi—the mirror was gone.

This announcement was made tersely by the kannushi, leading to all sorts of speculation. Some say the mirror had been gone for a long time, and the kannushi simply finally decided to come clean about this fact. Others say the disappearance of the mirror heralded the imminent return of Amaterasu (though if that were the case, she has been quite silent for the past five years). Others say that the mirror is missing due to one of the most accomplished shadowruns in recent memory.

Whatever the explanation is, many people believe the Yata no Kagami is out of the shrine and in the hands of people who are trying to learn what they can do with it, and many people in the Court would like to be the ones performing that research. Some stories about the Yata no Kagami say that the mirror shows an individual's true nature, and while the stories are not entirely clear as to just what that means, the premise is intriguing enough to drive several active searches for this legendary item.

Shuffling Destiny

The Sixth World tarot is a mystery, which is exactly what it is supposed to be. It is connected to some of the oldest magic known in the world, but it has taken on aspects of the modern world, seeming to evolve with the times. It shows things that never were, things that quite recently were, and things that will be soon. Cards seem to change—there are descriptions of some cards from multiple witnesses that are different in minor ways, and other descriptions that vary in almost all aspects. The cards change, and no one knows why. There are hidden puzzles and themes that emerge when multiple cards are together, different motifs that may have meaning or may just be in viewers' imaginations.

The nature of these puzzles and the scope of the divining activities that those searching for the cards are attempting is beyond the scope of this discussion. Instead, let us focus on the factions with a particular interest in the cards.

Unsurprisingly, **Magician** is very interested in learning more about the cards. They believe magic to be ordered and understandable, so they very much want to know how the tarot cards fit into the system as they know it, as well as gain a better understanding of the information reflected on the cards and the source of the images. Their work is being coordinated (because all work that goes forth from Magician must be coordinated) by Arcanist, Second Tier Nigella Ciratodan. She is absolutely humorless about her work and does not appreciate idle speculation. If you are looking for a source of solid information about the cards, she is perhaps the best, though she does not share what she knows with just anyone. You will have to do a good job of convincing her you deserve to hear what she knows.

The **Comet** faction is very interested in the tarot cards, as they very much demonstrate the interaction between magical realms and the material plane, which of course they are obsessive about. This means they are not just trying to collect cards; they are very dedicated

to uncovering what specific cards reveal, to the point of seeking out the scenes pictured on the guards and watching as those scenes unfold. "Watching" is a key term, as they are also dedicated to not interfering with the scenes. They are trying to see how the cards and reality interact, rather than change anything or interfere with the workings of the cards in anyway. This puts most of their tarot-related activities under the oversight of their leading covert-ops specialist, Lino Haya. He has at least two teams out at all times, looking to witness events depicted on cards. Until recently, both teams spent almost all of their time on the material plane, but recently they have been occasionally drifting into the metaplanes, which indicates an interesting new direction for Comet's thinking about what the cards depict.

Death is also actively engaged in the search for tarot cards, though they are not approaching it with the same investigative bent as Comet and Magician. Rather than attempting to learn more about how the tarot functions, they are attempting to use it toward their own ends. For a time, this took the form of them attempting to perform large-scale readings with the cards. They would record where cards appeared and the time and nature of their appearing, and use that to glean information about the future. While some of their interpretations were broad enough that just about any event could have fulfilled the cards' supposed predictions, the faction felt the experiment had been successful enough to move on to new stage of their operations. Rather than simply using the cards to divine the future, they are attempting to manipulate the emergence of cards to shape the future. This is a staggeringly difficult task, as locating the cards is one level of difficulty, but getting them to show up in some other area, while also hoping that the changes you are making will shape the future as you intend, is an entirely different challenge. The Death faction is taking in this difficult task with their customary confidence, acting as though the seemingly impossible will be achieved as long as they are the ones doing it. The rest of the Court, then, is observing their actions with increasing worry. If cards are being sought, be aware that Death might be close on the heels of the seekers, hoping to steer the cards to a destination that suits their complex ends.

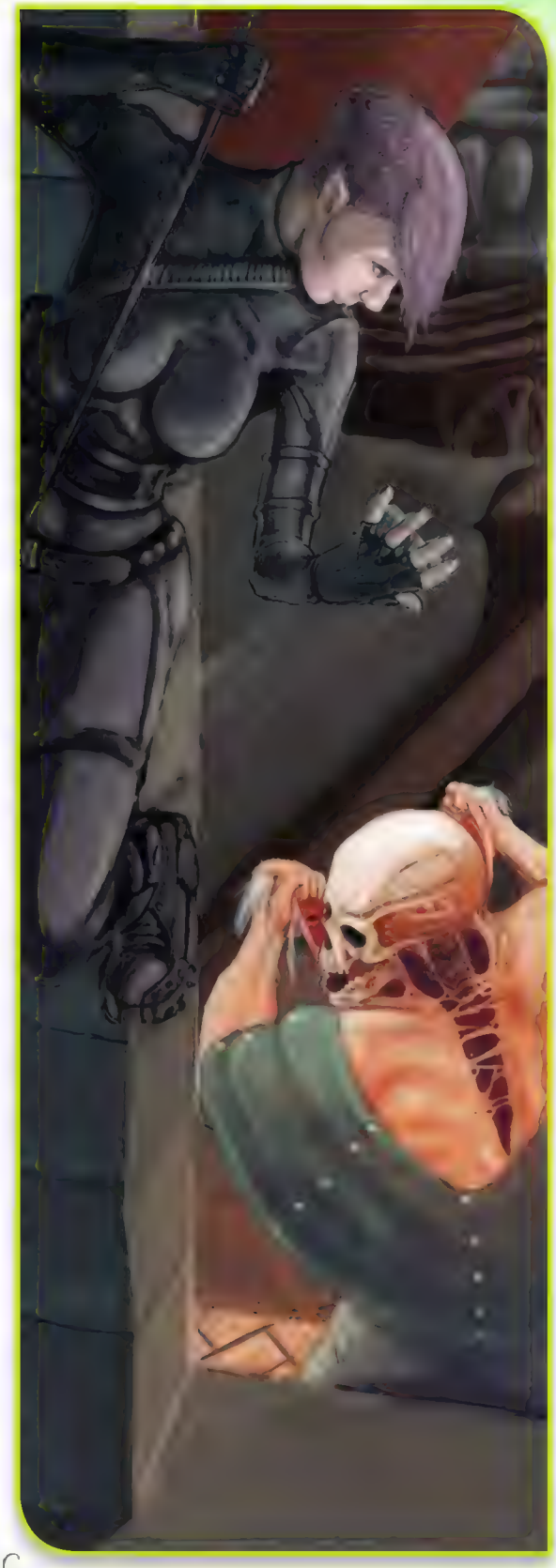
Finding someone in Death to discuss their work is quite difficult, as Death operatives tend to hate outsiders. Additionally, the faction is not fond of hierarchical systems. Death, as they persistently believe, always claims its own, regardless of the plans set in motion to avoid it. Faction members occasionally discuss their larger plans and common goals, but typically the work to carry out those plans is done by those who have the proper initiative and opportunity to make it function. What that comes down to is that any member of the Death faction you encounter may be working on finding tarot cards, but they are equally likely to have no knowledge whatsoever of the card-manipulating project. And either way, they are not likely to want to discuss it with the likes of you.

While the **Queen** is not as dedicated as the other factions to finding cards, she likes to keep tabs on what the other factions are up do and would appreciate any information about card-chasing activities be brought to her. What she will do with this information is quite unclear. The rewards she has to offer—primarily those of increased stature in the Court and the possibility of her owing a favor—can be enough for many courtiers to freely share what they know with her. Naturally, when information is currency, there will be those who attempt forgery. Some people, foolishly, have tried to provide the Queen with inaccurate (our outright made-up) information as to the location of some cards, hoping that they can receive some favor from her before she discovers their deceit. Or, since this is the way the Court so often works, perhaps those giving her false information know full well that she will double-check whatever it is that they share, and it is the results of her efforts to confirm what they tell her—who she asks, where she looks, and so forth—that is their true reward. On top of that is the possibility that individuals are sharing information that they do not know to be false, because they were given that information by another faction engaged on some merry bit of deception, hoping to discredit their rivals. These are the tangled webs that are inevitably spun from desire.

You Aren't Supposed to Know

Let me tell you a story. Once there came to the court a woman wearing a dusky grey dress and a knowing smile. Every time she was introduced to someone—her name was given as Carnelian de Raven—they nodded vaguely, as if they were fairly confident they had heard her name before but could not remember where. In the course of conversation with her they would make the sort of vague statements anyone who frequents the Court is accustomed to making, and each time she made some expression or gesture that led them to believe she knew exactly what it was they were concealing. Some decided to challenge her on her seeming assumptions—indirectly, of course, since that is the customary way challenges are given in the Court—dangling sentences in front of her that would make absolutely no sense to someone who did not have the knowledge she intimated she had. Each and every time, she would pick up at least a part of that idea and return it with a piece of that knowledge, making it clear that she was no pretender—she was a true insider. Those conversing with her could proceed secure in the belief that any secrets that they let slip out would fall onto the ears of someone who was already in the know.

They were wrong, of course. The woman had spent years studying three things: The members of the Court, the rumors they spread, and the secrets of reading people. She knew what interested people, what key words would draw them out, and how to appear knowledgeable without actually knowing all that much. The haul of secrets she gathered in her time at the Court made her truly powerful, winning her many friends and accruing an impressive assembly of enemies. Desperation mounted to discover any verifiable facts about who she really was and, most importantly, for whom she worked. The sheer virtuosity of her deceit led many to conclude she must be Hanged Man operative, but she did not seem as hostile to the Court as that faction sometimes can be. Comet was another popular choice, as their wide-ranging search for knowledge seemed to mesh well her broad information-gathering activities. In fact, rumors eventually spread that even if she was not acting on behalf of Comet, the faction was quite interested in having her in a leadership position, and would do whatever it took to make such an appointment happen (including the removal and



possible disposal of existing leaders who might stand in her way). Tensions in the Court mounted; many people wanted to see de Raven elevated, others wanted to see her exiled, and a fair number would have been pleased to see her dead. It appeared that all was going to come to a head at that year's Deadwinter Ball, but de Raven did not appear at the ball—or at the Court, ever again. Her name was never again read by the Court herald, and her visage was never again seen. Her disappearance, as with every other aspect of her, became the subject of heated Court speculation. That subject still recurs from time to time, though with lesser frequency and passion due to the passage of time.

The point of the story is two-fold. First, careers and reputations can be made entirely on one's abilities to ferret out what others would very much like to keep from you; and second, there are some mysteries of the Court that are implacably stubborn, despite the desire of many Court members to penetrate whatever veil keeps them hidden. With so many mechanisms built to obscure the truth, it is no surprise that some things fall into the hiding place of obscure history, never to be found again. Previous sections of this chapter have touched on some of those mysteries, but to whet your appetite for your next trip to the Court, here are a few other lingering mysteries that occupy the attention of courtiers.

Who Killed Gristle Teres?

Violence is, of course, frowned on in the Court, but then again so is deceit, and the latter is practiced with regularity. So while courtiers might attempt to keep the peace, violence occasionally rears its head, and no death in recent memory has shook the Court like that of Gristle Teres. The shock was not because Teres was believed to be well liked—indeed, he was viewed as uncouth and unpleasant company, with a permanent sneer and a snarl penetrating every word that came out of his mouth. Many courtiers would have been quite willing to inflict some degree of harm on Teres, but they would not be likely to go so far as what actually happened to him.

His passing occurred in full public view, during the Morning Hearings on a particularly bright day when light streamed in through every possible Court window. This displeased Teres, who typically sought the darkest corner of the Court he could find and bided his time there. This morning, such corners were in short supply. Teres took to walking the perimeter of the Grand Hall, glaring and anyone in his way and emitting what sounded like curt, dog-like barks. The first sign that trouble might be looming came when he passed by a morbi standing in silent vigil against one wall. He quickly saw another of the creatures, then a third, then more. On his next pass,

Where to Discuss Mysteries

The purposes of most banquets at the Court are clear. The Ember Banquets are for those who have fallen out of favor in the Court, and generally feature discussions about how to move up in prominence, or complaints about those in power. The Queen's Banquet is primarily about being seen and basking in the presence of the Queen. The Regency Banquet, though technically less prominent and exclusive than the Queen's Banquet, is where things get done, where alliances are formed, plans are made, and occasionally masterstrokes carried out.

None of these are appropriate for discussing some of the arcane matters discussed herein. The Queen has no patience for such matters, and if you happen to gain access to the Queen's Banquet, there are perhaps more urgent matters that should gain your attention. The Ember Banquets host all sorts of meandering conversations, but the nature of the attendees at those banquets means the chance of obtaining meaningful information is low.

[illegible] become interesting to those interested in mysteries and secrets. There are three gatherings known as the Feast of the Fallen (the origin of that name is lost in the far reaches of Court history) that are part of the broad [illegible] of banquets in the Court. These gatherings tend to attract people with the proper combination of [illegible] and eccentricity to make discussion of the deeper secrets of the Court worthwhile. The Feasts of th[illegible] [illegible]

he noted perhaps two dozen of the wide-eyes creatures waiting and staring vacantly into the distance. We have, of course, no way of knowing if he mentally tallied them as a harbinger of what was about to happen.

Accounts of what happened next differ. According to some, the grand chandelier in the middle of the hall started slowly rotating, and Teres was one of the first to notice it, staring in astonishment. Others say Teres stopped and looked at the chandelier well before it started moving, and some say it was his extended index finger that started the object rotating. Whatever the case, the rotation became faster and faster, and the sight of the spinning object as well as the clanking of glass drew the attention of most onlookers in the hall.

There is general agreement on what happened next. Teres advanced toward the middle of the hall, still pointing at the chandelier, and unleashed a series of curses that likely should have left a scorch mark in the floor of the hall. Had any deities been present in the Court at the time, Teres would surely have been stricken down for blasphemy, as his curses eagerly befouled just about anything anyone could ever cherish or find sacred. He did not seem nearly as surprised about the chandelier's movement as did other courtiers; rather, he seemed to take it as a personal insult.

When he was approximately five meters away from the chandelier, his feet rose off the ground, and he began a stately ascent toward the bottom of the chandelier. Again, he did not seem overly surprised, taking his removal from the ground in stride, as it were, while continuing his blistering curses.

A number of people in the Court assensed Teres at that point, since assensing is part of the normal way they view the world. They say Teres was in an extremely upset emotional state, which of course is no surprise, and they add that there were one or two creatures near him, bearing him up. These creatures or individuals were masking their auras, though, making them difficult to see—some observers report seeing no such beings. Whatever was happening beneath him, Teres remained intent on yelling at the chandelier.

His slow path eventually brought him under the spinning glass, and then into contact. The exact nature and corporeality of many courtiers is up for debate, but at this point it became quite clear that Teres was a being fully of flesh and blood—because the chandelier cut through that flesh and blood and spun it across the hall. It was a nightmarish sight—if the act were an assassination, it was a dramatic and spectacular one. Teres continued his angry shouting without even a note of pain in his voice until he no longer had lungs to propel his voice forward. Whatever was lifting him kept it up until the chandelier had done thorough work on every piece of him.

It was a perplexing death for a number of reasons. First, it seemed unduly complicated and dramatic. With the slow speed of Teres levitating toward the chandelier, it would seem there were a number of chances for onlookers or Teres himself to intervene and save his life. Why use such a potentially unreliable mode of assassination? (The fact that no one in the Court, which is of course full of people of considerable magic ability, made much of an effort to save Teres during his ascent is another ongoing mystery.) Teres had no clear faction affiliation, though most people associated him with Hermit simply due to his demeanor. The first suspect in any conflict involving Hermit is, of course, Eclipse, but Teres' killing fell so far outside their typical mode of operation that it is very difficult to believe they have any connection to it. In fact, the violence was so over-the-top that it is difficult to associate it with any known faction except possibly Dragon, which has been known to lean toward excess in the demonstration of their magic powers. Many courtiers quickly assumed that the assassination was a hidden faction announcing their presence, but Teres' death was not followed by any other related activities that would bring a hidden faction into the open. Which means that if the murder was a way of announcing a new faction's presence, it was an announcement that quickly fizzled into nothingness.

Another theory is that Teres' death was the action of visitors from the material plane. Courtiers have a certain bias against mortals (a term they use for residents of our plane, despite their decided lack of immortality), believing them to be dumb brutes unusually prone to violence. The bloody nature of Teres' passing fits very nicely with their view of how mortals deal with problems. For the most part, though, that is as far as this theory goes, as there is little concrete information as to which group of mortals killed Teres, and why they wanted him dead.

There is one intriguing clue, though making clear sense of it has been a challenge. Teres had a handwritten note in his pocket, and subsequent research showed it was not written by him. The note said, "Be filled with rumor of people sorrowing." Whether that was a threat, a warning, an augury of his death, or something else is unknown, but it is the subject of many speculative conversations in the Court.

The Existence of Mulberry Crump

Ask the longest-tenured members of the Court about Mulberry Crump, and they will tell you he has been there as long as they can remember. He is an odd figure, extremely crook-legged and hunchbacked, and he doesn't so much walk as he skitters. At countless events and balls over the many seasons, he has been there, usually near the wall, almost always moving, frequently disturbing other courtiers with a gaze that lingers too long and contains too much lust and/or hostility for anyone's comfort. Most courtiers are familiar with his scratchy voice, his onion-esque aroma, and his quick twitches of his head during conversation. What they cannot tell you is what faction he may be associated with, how he receives invitations to various Court events, and just what it is he thinks he is doing in the Court.

Crump has been seen at just about every banquet or formal affair staged by the Court. Some weeks he seems to be out of favor, relegated to one of the Ember Banquets, but he has been seen at Regency Banquets and even, on one fairly recent occasion, at the Queen's Banquet. Occasionally, during Morning Hearings, he has been granted one of the white lotuses that puts him in the first group of questioners, though he tends to use that opportunity to indulge in long, rambling monologues that do not end in a question, so rather than talking and then waiting for the Queen or one of her representatives to share information, he talks for a while and then shuffles awkwardly away. People have been exiled from the Court for lesser misdeeds, yet Crump repeatedly returns, even though no one will admit to being allied or even friendly with him. If he has patrons at the Court—and he must—they are stubbornly silent about why he is there and how he is being used.

The most common theory is that Crump exists to distract the Court from something else, though few people have developed a good theory as to what that might be. It has become something of a game when he speaks during Morning Hearings to scan the room and attempt to find out what might be happening that Crump is trying to distract attention from. Success in finding such matters has not been realized, and the current theory is that Crump's words are a distraction from something he himself is doing, though again, what that thing may be is unclear.

The long and the short of it is, anyone who uncovers just what is behind Crump's continued existence at Court may or may not uncover a significant secret, but they definitely will be the center of Court attention for several cycles.

The Aconite Door

Anyone who has spent more than a moment or two in the Court is aware of its changeable nature. Visitors may fall asleep at night in a room next to their fellow faction members and friends, only to find that in the morning they are lodged in the midst of their direst enemies. The same hallway may be traveled a dozen times without the same destination being reached. Wall colors shift, doors appear and disappear, ceilings change to make a room feel more spacious or more cramped, sculptures growth and mutate, and so on. There is a pattern to many of these changes, or else no one would ever be able to navigate the structure at all, but some elements are truly random. One of these is the Aconite Room. The room is named for the flower depicted on its door, a purple blossom with a stretched-out, hood-like top section. Also known as wolf's bane, the flower is quite poisonous, even away from the temporal plane. The door in question is made from a light wood—knotty pine, based on most descriptions—with a bas-relief carving of an aconite flower about three-quarters of the way up. The flower, its stem, and leaves are painted with dark, glossy pigments, making them stand out clearly from the door.

Along with being poisonous, aconite is generally associated with a certain hatred of living beings, and the appearance of the room seems to bode ill for whoever sees it. Twenty-three seasons ago, Magician faction viceroy Gemma Plover saw the door and was curious to inspect it, but before she could open it a herald summoned her to the Queen's banquet. Plover left the Court the next day, and took ill once she returned to her home plane. She has not been seen at Court since, and many courtiers speculate that she no longer exists.

More recently, sixteen seasons ago, a visitor known as Ambassador Crowley, who refused to say who he was an ambassador of, was heard at the Regency Banquet to ask what was behind the door with the lovely wolf's bane carving on it. Little information about what Crowley saw was gathered, as he disappeared from his room overnight. His bed linens were on the floor, ripped and bloodstained, and the window to his room was broken. He was never heard from again.

Rumors state that the Queen herself saw the aconite door just before the major disruption that opened the new passageway to the Court. That, as much as anything else, has led to her negative view of the influx of new visitors to the Court.

The appearance of the door raises at least two questions: First, what causes the door to appear at these times? Second, what, if anything, is behind the door? Given the troubles that have followed the appearance of the door, any explorations of what is on the other side should be undertaken with considerable caution.

The Roosevelt Manuscript

This mystery is almost pure puzzle. There is an intermittently appearing room known as the Sea of Trees, where double black stone doors open onto a densely packed series of trees that rise up into a dark, misty void of a ceiling. The room, when it appears, tends to stay stable for four or five days, and it is a popular spot for picnics, despite its rather dark nature. The last time it appeared, a group of courtiers believed to be associated with the Eclipse faction entered the room and, about ten meters in found a piece of folded parchment nailed to a tree. On the outside of the paper was a single word: "Roosevelt." Quite naturally, they removed the paper, unfolded it, and read what was inside. Below is the text in its entirety:

Yet there remains a little spark of hope
That lights me to some comfort.

Hope was left.

Hope was lost.

Follow the lines.

Follow the source.

Recover.

Always in sight.

The opening lines have been identified as a quote from *Double Falsehood*, a play by Lewis Theobald that has occasionally been connected, in a variety of ways, with Shakespeare. The remaining lines are a mystery, though. Who "Roosevelt" is, who wrote the note, and what it is referring to are very much a mystery, a puzzle that has been part of many entertaining Court conversations.

Forms of Function

A Guide by Purlie Tallow

The Seelie Court: birthplace of plots, intrigues, and so, so many parties. Imagine yourself standing before a newly opened door that starts you on the path to the Court. You very well may feel uncertainty, nervousness about what awaits you beyond the threshold. Allow me to educate you.

If you choose to skip these pages, I shall state here that I summarily refuse to be held responsible for what may befall you. Perhaps an enchanting creature will ensnare you with a song and beckon you to join in a dance. If you wake up from the dance to find yourself close to death, bleeding out from your feet, you have only yourself to blame. Perhaps you avoid all merriment on our shores, eager to keep your free will. Has not everyone said to avoid food and drink among our kind? Nonsense. If you do not heed my words, you will die of starvation or thirst because "everyone" is a poor replacement for me.

Do you understand?

Good. Then we may continue.

What will you be hired to do in the Seelie Court? I've talked to a number of individuals, high and low, left and right, odd and even, who tell me, in no uncertain terms, that they aren't particularly sure. But whatever it is, it promises to line your pockets with the kind of items courtiers find valuable.

The Court is full of characters and opportunities. Keep your wits about you, question everything (though avoid questioning anything too openly; at best you will mark yourself as new, while at worst you will literally lose your head after a courtier takes the question for contempt), and most importantly, keep my advice in mind.

Court is filled with creatures lovely and horrific, kind and wicked, sweet and savory. You will be the odd addition. Remember this in all of your dealings. Some will fail to understand you, others will not care to understand you. If someone tells you they understand you perfectly, they lie, for perfect understanding is impossible.

A note: I will now guide you through what you may expect from your stay at court. I will repeat myself, largely because the points I repeat are that important, but also because I do so love the way I put together words.

If you are reading this, I trust you have need of knowledge to utilize in new and unexpected ways. (Those of you reading this who do *not* have need of the knowledge within will almost certainly find yourselves in need of it before long, for the secrets of our world have a way of ensnaring those who discover them.) You must be prepared to use this knowledge in new and unexpected ways, for the souls of this world are very old and have seen and defeated countless planners and plotters. You will have to be unique to remain.

Your role at court is what you will make of it. Perhaps you will become an asset, even a noble to be admired by our people. You may become the recipient of vast sums of wealth. You may become our entertainment (and if this becomes the case, trust that you will be dead soon but adored for *many* years after—and we have long memories—so take heart). Or you may serve in secret, perhaps as a valuable spy or thief.

All of these roles have one thing in common: they require your survival, at least for a time. This is where I come in. Heed my words and you will survive longer than if you ignored them. Consider me your tour guide and faithful companion as we examine your role in my home.

Firstly, who am I to educate and accompany you? Good question. In this and in other dealings in my world, be certain you know whatever you can know about whomever and whatever you encounter. For my part, I am simply an interested party. I will not hide the fact that it benefits me to ensure all outside visitors know where to step and from where to leap clear.

You may trust, however, that I am an unparalleled expert in the Seelie Court. I have lived here as long as I can remember, which is a very long time by most estimations. I have watched representatives of governments and corporations brought to their knees on our literal and figurative shores. I have witnessed beggars rise to idolization in the eyes of the public. Moreover, I have uncountable acquaintances here. Out of all those who welcome you with bright eyes and sweet smiles, I know which prefer to see you return home peacefully and which prefer to drain some of your life, or perhaps all of it, from you. Seek me out when you arrive. Remain on my good side, and I will steer you away from those who wish you harm.

I enjoy learning What's Going On and Who's Who. As a result, I am an excellent source of knowledge and contacts. I possess legal and magical skills and have a fine appreciation for the subtle differences in flavor among blood types (I have recently discovered that A+ blood makes an A-plus czernina). But what qualifies me best to educate you is the fact I am willing to do so; let us get on with it.

I shall break my education down into two halves. The first is the most important, and if you retain nothing else from what I say here, remember *What to Remember as you Travel This Realm*. In the second half, I will break down several roles for which you may be hired.

Why am I assisting you? As I've mentioned, it benefits me to ensure you know your way around. But I also enjoy teaching. The thrill of leading creatures to hang on my words grew tiresome in my previous employment as a judge, believe it or not, simply because none of the creatures who heard my words were able to spread them in the afterlife. So I have turned to teaching others. Chances are good that my students live longer than those I sent to hang, but only if they heed my lessons!

Here is the First Half: *What to Remember as You Travel This Realm*. Pay attention and heed what I say. In any task set to you here, several constants play a part. Forget them at your peril, be it a swift and painless death or an eternity of misery.

That said, here are my warnings given with only the lightest heart. I do not aim to dissuade you from traveling here, only to provide you with a map of the land and its myriad of hazards. You see, there are several facets of our world of which you must remain aware, if you are to travel safely within it.

First, all is magical. By this I mean that everything, from the smallest pebble to the entire world itself, may not be as it appears. A pebble may be a key, a spirit, a pet, a guard, sentient, omnipotent, or only a pebble. I will give you specific advice in only this instance: Take special care with the rabbits of the Southern Reach. Do not ask me to elaborate.

The simplest way I have found to describe how to remember this is to ask yourself, at every available opportunity, how those within your sight could attempt to kill you. Then, at the very least, you will be prepared for the worst magic has to offer you. You may not be able to do anything about it, but at least you will be prepared.

Second, most is not as it seems. Strike not the aggressive hound nor pat the sweet feline, for the hound will undoubtedly bear wise advice to the astute as readily as said feline removes your hand from your wrist with a bite. Keep this also in mind when dealing with my brothers, sisters, and other assorted countrymen. A pinched, surly magistrate may unselfishly grant your sweetest wish, just as the luxurious, welcoming whore may entrap you in nation-altering plots.

Third, forces within our world do not wish your success. It is not me of whom I speak, for I would not inform you in these writings were it me. But when I leave this place, I will carry with me talismans, charms against harm, and most importantly, a keen eye cast over my shoulder. Although I admit that the most important will be for me to remember to pick up the aforementioned eye and return it to its socket, for I do not cast aside gifts such as two perfectly functioning eyeballs. But you have the idea of it. Talismans, charms, and a good sense of protective magics can do nothing to protect you if you do not know to keep them close.

More commonly, a head situated straight upon your shoulders should be sufficient to suss out the most callous offenders. It is my understanding that most people traveling to our realm from your own are familiar with the notion of powerful forces seeking to do them harm. It is no different here. Make allies and keep an eye out (though remember to retrieve it when you are finished).

Fourth, always remain respectful. My world is filled with a menagerie of remarkable, fantastic creatures, all of whom are as haughty and prideful as the metaplanes are vast. Do not cut short your visit (and life) by behaving boorishly toward anyone.

It is true that several factions with which I am familiar laud boorish behavior and seek it out. Chances are good that these individuals do not have your best interests at heart. Consider yourself warned. However,

should you choose to engage in business with these sorts, understand that civilized behavior will likely be mocked and certainly be punished. Boorish behavior will probably also be punished, as will neutrality for that matter. They are a bunch of louts. Best to avoid them altogether if given a choice.

Everybody here wants you in some fashion. Some want your knowledge, some want your fealty, some want your possessions, some want your body, some want your soul, and some want you wearing their clothing designs. Still others want your blood, your life force, your secrets. Your stay with us will be easier for you if you acknowledge and remember this. Although the advice to avoid food and drink here is ridiculous, it still contains a grain of truth. Be careful what you allow others to serve you, whether they claim it is sustenance, advice, or truth. The self-sufficient among you will doubtless remain safer.

While I am certain I could fill your day with my warnings, if you keep these four points in mind during your stay, you will survive long enough for my countrymen to challenge your survivability in novel and fascinating ways.

Do not say I did not warn you; I do not take liars lightly.

Because our worlds are so new to one another (although I freely admit to knowledge of a number of individuals, from your world and my own, who have traipsed about in my world and your own for generations, the majority of each world is largely ignorant of the others' existence), the possibilities for learning are endless. Some of the questions we face when educating ourselves are:

Who makes up the power structure?

Where are the borders?

Who pays for work?

In what currency do said individuals pay?

Should you tip?

In all these aspects, I am here to help you.

Far be it from me to suggest where you should fill your employment dance card, but allow me to suggest that you choose carefully. Certain parties here suffer memories stretching back tens of generations. I should clarify that not all parties suffer; plenty relish the ties cut and burned, the bridges capsized into the currents of shifting alliances, and the few friends held fast amidst the destruction. The point is that one wrong choice may cost you future alliances.

With which factions should you work? Only you can make that choice. I cannot guide you other than to reiterate that you follow my advice and keep your

wits about you. The mannerisms and culture of each group may vary wildly, and you must decide with which eccentricities you feel most comfortable.

In some cases, you will not have a choice. Certain parties do not blend with certain traits. For example, as fine a quality as it is to possess a silvered tongue it will not help you when dealing with some, shall we say, lower sorts. Naturally suspicious and prone to outbursts of foul odor, these sorts view the beautiful and the useful with trepidation and disgust. Their favorite form of diplomacy involves all things noxious and vulgar. As a result, they may become your favorite folk, but do not attempt to persuade them with refinement.

The role you play at court may depend on the factions with which you have allied yourself. Or at least from which you have accepted work. Over the years, outsiders' roles shrink and grow according to whim. Some prefer to show off their exotic outsiders and show them off through every manner of feast, ball, and outing imaginable. Others have thought themselves in possession of a thing rare and valuable and, as such, have kept "their" outsiders behind closed doors and secreted away. I cannot say for certain who will treat you how without naming specific names, which I prefer to avoid here, but I can say they will probably surprise you at some point.

But how will I know whom to choose, you may ask yourself.

This is where information gathering prior to your employment becomes vital. (The applicable term is "legwork," so I am told, although I admit to prior engagement of this term in the context of racks and heated metal shoes. But I digress.) Which lady pits her favorite courtiers against rogues sent after her (winner keeps the head!)? Which lord rewards those top-performers within his employ with a private audience (none of whom are seen again and are rumored to have died of pleasure)? Who among the multitudes of professional information dealers can you trust? Your existing relationships will guide your choices.

Please allow me to begin the second half of this work—your role at court—by stating that I will not parse out responsibilities. By this I mean that will not tell you how to fulfill your role, only suggest what roles may be available. Be certain opportunities exist for all; you only have to know where to look for them.

I know of many factions in which it is fashionable to avoid being observed accomplishing anything. To have others (physical or magical) perform your work for you marks you as an important individual, and sometimes that perception is all you need to obfuscate your real work. Alternately, there exist factions in which anyone who pushes their work off on others is viewed as weak. Enter the ever-present warnings: take care to know where you are and where you are going, or the opinions of the locals will define you with a far heavier hand than you probably would have wished.

Lacking silvered speech? You may wish for a talented companion when determining the intricacies of your contract, but other than the possibility of greater reward, no reason exists for you to be left out of employment. Consider Deproix, a gentleman I knew generations ago. Deproix possessed enough cognitive faculties to totter about on his own, though none would accuse him of genius. However, Deproix garnered enough favor with a faction that shall remain unnamed that he rose to extremely high station and retired from public life to an existence of which we can only dream. How did a man once referred to as an unwashed barbarian achieve Dreamlord status? Rumors say it had everything to do with his patrons. He purportedly completed enough tasks for the right individuals (and possessed a healthy amount of luck to have stumbled across the right individuals—no one claimed Deproix was graceful) that he became a sort of a mascot to a highly influential courtier. And before you bend yourself out of shape considering you could become, of all things, a common mascot, don't. Remember that whatever heights your ego reaches, our average ego eclipses them. Return to your home and there you may flex your ego as much as you desire, in the safety of your own metaplane.

Do not expect any reputation you possess among those from your home to follow you here. Word of mouth about your qualities and skills may help you gain opportunities, but you must prove yourself to gain our trust. Reputation from your plane will do little to establish yourself here. Your actions will have to serve as your résumé.

The reason for this is that we are exceptionally proud. We may not put much stock in your reputation, but we expect you to know ours and are quite taken aback when you don't. That means that you never know when the most well-meaning statement will backfire, when ignorance of someone's name or title will sentence you to misery, when failing to recognize the grandeur and significance of the royal cockatoo will lose you your head.

Knowledge will always serve you well. Did you know that the former Duke of The Bode possesses a singular hatred for compliments? Now you know. But without this vital piece of information, you may have complimented him, which would have resulted in your quick bath in boiling oil, followed by your presentation at his feast table, apple between your teeth. Did you know that Princess Cranogwen demands that her name replace any other name in a ballad sung publicly within her earshot? Bards may cringe at replacing "May" or "Anne" with "Cranogwen," but they dare not cringe outwardly. Some courtiers possess a pride so great that the slightest mistake in custom or courtly demeanor will sentence the offender to horrific fates, including but not limited to public flogging, flaying, or stoning; death by dancing; permanent obfuscation; or even ejection from court.

Be on guard, for my kin are also fickle and eccentric. Not all of us, of course, but many. Fickleness and eccentricity tend to accompany great wealth and plentiful leisure time, both of which we enjoy in quantity.

"Eccentric" may be a mild way to communicate insanity. Plenty of my countryfolk qualify for the descriptor, I will admit. But some of the sharpest minds and fattest purses may be found on those possessing the weakest grasp on reality—or at least, on what most of us perceive as reality—so do not be so quick to judge, lest you find yourself shut out from said purses' contents.

Capriciousness is far more common. If you are unprepared to face mercurial attitudes and opinions, you are unprepared to travel here. I am acquainted with a judge of high station who regularly changes his decision after declaring it. It has become common for lawyers, having heard a decision from my friend that benefits them, to flee with their clients from the courtroom before the judge can change his mind.

Long are our memories and nurtured are our grudges. I know of a lovely creature who flies into an apoplexy of spitting rage whenever she hears the term "pudding." The story goes that during a cold and wet spring, an outsider visited her estate. The outsider taught the chef learned how to make a regional treat called "Summer Pudding." When consuming the dish failed to call forth the season of summer, she flew into a rage and had the outsider drawn, hanged, disemboweled, and quartered. This occurred several centuries ago and, although she is sweet and divine the rest of the time, she *will* murder anyone who utters the word "pudding" within earshot.

Take care that you are aware of what sets off your host—or even those around you.

Schemes permeate our realm. You did not need me to tell you that, I hope. I understand that most of you believe the same is true about your own world, but I disagree. Movements here send ripples through our world and your own; they have for a very long time, and I doubt many of you were even aware of this before you stumbled upon us.

Remember that you are easily visible. You and yours almost glow with a certain newness and odd freshness I cannot quite describe (yes, even the more odoriferous of you). Suffice it to say that we notice. Keeping your presence and passage hidden may prove difficult. Considering members of your own kind play here alongside you, your noticeability may help you as well as hinder you.

Keep in mind that it will not only be the deceptions and dealings of native residents with which you must contend. Your fellow visitors undoubtedly seek employment here also and you will cross paths with them in no time.

This runs a snag through any jobs you accept. Not only must you cope with conniving Good Folk (as we are sometimes erroneously known), but you must also deal with the machinations of your own kind. Do not for one moment fool yourself into thinking your own world's designs have not set root here. I know of one particular faction of your world—quite a powerful one—that has been trying to set its teeth into a faction of my world for some time. I do not wish to name names in this instance (I am told fuller descriptions of such things reside elsewhere in this compilation). No doubt your paths will cross.

Complete a job here and you may find yourself at odds with your kin. What happens when you return home? How much power and influence do your kin have in your world? Because the power they hold here may not match up to their power there. This could be of advantage to you, particularly if you have little power at home and we find you interesting. Think of it: you, a powerless peon in your home world, battling and besting the representatives of your most powerful leaders. Although I have heard tales of just these sorts of epic battles undertaken in your world, I have also heard that the escape in such instances is more rare than victory, and also more rare than survival. But if you battle them here and best them, do not you control whether they rise at last to return home? Why should any of their kin know in what manner they met their end? For this place is a murky pool from which not everyone emerges.

Information Gathering

The most common and widespread role you will encounter here is that of information gathering. Not only will these sorts of jobs require you to sniff out information, but information greases the gears of any job here and helps keep your head safely attached to the rest of your body.

What sort of information must you gather? It depends on the area and the employer. One of my favorite jobs over the years was to find deserters from other factions and interrogate them. Deserters can be a source of much information. The best parts of the task were both the contacts I made among them—useful if they ever made their way back into their home's good graces—and the fact that they had already turned their backs on their kin. No one to miss them if push came to shove came to knife through the throat. You may not have the overwhelming charisma I enjoy, but if you are smart, you can always find a way to benefit from any role, even if it's only from the pay.

Your job could be as straightforward as delivering the news to court. Doubtless every important person keeps hounds on hand to sniff out the latest news, but anyone who has someone doing a job for them tends to be on the lookout for someone who could do it better. The quality of the news you deliver could perhaps connect you to a possible new position. Delivering news to the court is a wonderful position for creative types, who know how to deliver the truth with beauty. However, I warn you against embroidering the truth or weaving an entire account from the fabric of falsehood. Always expect your employer to retain several other agents, all of whom consider themselves enemies of one another and regularly vet each others' claims in attempts for a greater share of their master's trust. Beware. Unless you enjoy that sort of intrigue, in which case I wish you the best of luck.

News is a straightforward job. You may believe it requires investigation and pluck. It does, but more importantly, it requires very clear direction from your employer. You must know on what manner of news your employer wishes you to report. For example, you have discovered that factions vie for power at court. Your employer may laud your news-gathering efforts. However, most people I know here would send you back for more information. "Factions vie for power at court? This is a daily occurrence. Come back when you have something newsworthy!"

By contrast, some of the dullest jobs I have performed consisted of observation and reporting. Once, my employer wished me to count our neighbor's livestock. I cannot fathom why it wished to know that Parrish Parish owned 305 cows, 246 sheep, ten calves, and twelve lambs, but I performed my duty, dull as it was. Chances are good that you can avoid this sort of mundane task if you aren't picky about who employs you. Keep your options open, but never deal with dragons: they simply refuse to recognize hierarchy among non-dragons. It's tremendously insulting.

More often you will report on exciting things like shifts in court personnel, military movements, artifact hunts, public executions, and mass exoduses of creatures (rats, snakes, children, et cetera). Sometimes, if luck is with you, the job will require your recollection and account at court, possibly at Morning Hearings, or at one of the nightly banquets. I can think of no greater honor than to be asked to recount an exciting week's worth of observations. And if your week's observations were less than pure excitement, be prepared to toss in a few augmentations or creative intrigues to your narrative. There are none so unforgiving as bored courtiers—unless it is an employer who has discovered the help is augmenting the truth. Perhaps be certain of your employer's truth-compelling abilities first, yes?

A particularly fun sort of information to gather is to uncover someone's most central desire. What does he or she enjoy in a gift? What does she prefer the center of her chocolates to smell like? What does he prefer the center of his sacrifices to taste like? Not only can you have fun with this sort of job, but you can make fast friends of some influential people. Everyone likes to talk about what they enjoy, after all.

I recall that a few dozen years ago I spoke with the former Regent of Bathford—this would have been only a few years before his demise, rest his soul—and asked him what he wished his courtiers would present to him. He mulled it over for a few minutes before responding with "dates." It turned out that he was not looking for companionship—he had over a hundred young beauties for that—nor was he so fond of a particular variety of chewy fruit. He loved calendar dates, particularly those read aloud (though he had no real preference as to which astronomical clock was referenced in those dates). He said they were like music to him. No one could ever have guessed, I promise you.

I would like to take a moment to correct myself: not everyone enjoys discussing the things that bring

them enjoyment. Many prefer to expound upon what brings them dissatisfaction. All day long they will wail and gnash about the troubles of the world, their home, their family and friends, their pets, their household staff, and how their opinions are the target of focused, dyspeptic, and nonsensical conspiracies. I simply do not understand the inclination, although I recognize it exists and felt it best to warn you about it. Conversations with these sorts usually degrade into barks and howls of affront and accusation. You can be grateful that nearly all of these sorts live on your home plane, though, and you may consider your visit here a holiday from them.

What you do with this information you unearth about enjoyable subjects is entirely up to you. If you should choose to present your employer with this information, you will likely receive your agreed-upon reward. If you are clever, you could benefit in other ways. As an example, I hired a bard to recite every calendar date of the past decade in the common tongue to the aforementioned former Regent of Bathford, and then I asked him to sing them as sonnets (do not ask me how he accomplished this; I am no poet). The Regent sat in incomparable bliss for many hours. While the Regent was preoccupied, several expensive antiques disappeared from his property. They turned up safely in my own private collection a short time later, though I chose to keep this fact to myself.

You may be sent to discover what the neighbors are up to. More specifically, you may be asked to investigate the customs in practice among other factions. In general, courtiers are loathe to commit social faux pas, so the desire to conduct oneself without fault is high. I admit there are a few who enjoy committing social gaffes, but we do not discuss those types in polite company. For everyone else, knowledge and a touch of preparation arm against embarrassment.

Of course, plenty of hosts are happy to overlook the missteps of high-ranking company. But to be a stranger and somehow miraculously navigate the social niceties of a new culture? The allure of such a feat tempts some, and it may become your job to learn and report on other customs.

With which hand does one pick up which utensil first? Is it customary to speak or be spoken to first? Has wearing the bloodstains of your enemies on your garments really gone out of style so quickly? Where to begin? Practice acting the mild-mannered guest. Ask questions. Better you be considered the fool for asking than your employer. The locals will probably enjoy telling you all about their customs and how they developed.

In some cases, your host at court will ask you (or cajole, fool, or demand, depending on the individual) to educate them about whatever it is you know. Even if what you know is something you find terribly mundane, rest assured that you can make the subject matter entertaining for your host if you only try. You may be surprised at what my kin find interesting. Perhaps your audience simply does not know anything about the subject matter. Perhaps your audience will find material activities such as riding public transportation or consuming vast quantities of burritos endlessly entertaining. You can only know if you try.

Sometimes a specific field of knowledge interests your host and you happen to be an expert. (Was it truly free will that brought you, the expert, to stand before the curious host? Can you ever be certain?) Consider yourself lucky: This gives you the opportunity to wax at length about your topic of expertise. Not only that, but your host will also probably ensure your continued good health. At least until your host picks up enough knowledge of his or her own to render yours unnecessary, in which case you should disappear as soon as you are able.

Imagine how luxurious your station could be: You mingle among courtiers in your free time, amazing them with your breadth of knowledge about such fascinating topics as genetic engineering, the care and maintenance of firearms, or burrito construction. Once per day, perhaps once per week, your host beckons you forth to educate a small collection of your host's favorite people (including Himself, of course, Himself being his most favorite person). Your students ask brilliant questions: How many lives does a transgenic cat have? Is that leftover spring truly necessary? Will you draw us a chart of tortilla folding techniques? You provide brilliant answers. Repeat. Amazing, is it not?

But perhaps you do not care to spend all your time rehashing your knowledge from home. Perhaps you entrepreneurial types can find a way to profit from your employment in more than simply your pay. Perhaps misinformation could lay the groundwork for additional income. This is why I repeat: Meet people, learn about them, and keep your options open.

Regardless, prepare to recount any adventure at court afterward. Some of you will work with an unnamed representative of an unknowable employer (but you are accustomed to that, are you not?), but some of you will work for a far more typical shade of my kin: the irredeemable braggart. This sort wants nothing more than glory and praise from all with whom they cross paths. They may also hope to make you into a Court mascot!

Treasure Hunting

Hunting for treasures remains the most lucrative and dangerous of occupations, despite what others may tell you. My cousin insists that relationships and kingdom-crafting trump treasure hunting in danger and available reward, but most of you dear readers, lack centuries in which to machinate, leaving only the horrible danger, which is immediate and without reward.

Our world is filled with treasures, the results of a seeming eternity of people manipulating and enchanting objects. From the Brooch of Shifting (reputed to allow a magician to adapt to any background) to the Stone of Kharis (said to force anyone to stop what they are doing and pay close attention to the bearer's words, provided the words rhyme), treasures wondrous and ludicrous riddle the realm.

Study well here also, friend. Can you be certain the sword you have been sent to find bestows the bearer with keen balance, or is it more likely you have been sent to fetch the Sword of Everlasting Ignorance? Ask yourself whether your employer benefits from your diminished faculties, and you may have your answer.

Enough about what you will find. Let us discuss where you shall find it. If your employer sends you digging around in his or her own domains, consider yourself lucky. Unwarranted rooting around in the dirt constitutes questionable activity in many places; armed with permission, you will save valuable time and energy better spent searching. Plus, you will have the opportunity to ask your employer about hazards in the area, something you generally can only guess at in unknown territories.

More often than not, however, your employer will have her sights set on treasures in areas claimed by rival factions—why else would she hire you? You have a number of questions to answer before you partake of your mission. Will you obtain permission to hunt in foreign territory? If you do not obtain permission, to what lengths will you protect your intentions? If you do obtain permission, first, you possess a more silvery tongue than I (I joke! That is utterly impossible), but more importantly, you must choose whether to share your findings with the owner of the territory. Sometimes the owner will not give you the opportunity to choose: You must share your findings or turn them over in their entirety, which would make collecting your reward difficult.

As much as I prefer to have people notice when I am out doing interesting things, I must advise you to keep your search secret. Too many questions arise, making the tracking of your fabricated answers tedious and difficult, drawing your attention and memory-making faculties away from your employment. No employer wants that, trust me.

You have a destination, and you have chosen to keep your activities secret. The next question is: Where, specifically, should you search? Ruins are the obvious first choice. Whether the ruins remain standing or time has swept them away, they are worth a look. They may also be either the most dangerous places to search or the most likely to have already been looted. Prepare accordingly. For example, the lost workshop of Al'Farouk is now nothing more than a few stones that barely peek above the grass, but it still attracts pishachas roaming the sight, searching for whatever it is pishachas want when they are not feeding. The work of Al'Farouk may still tie them to the spot, or they may be hunting for some item he left behind eons ago.

Residences of nobles and other individuals of high status make another excellent choice. Rulers often possess numerous abodes sprinkled throughout their territory. While the style and glamour of owning so many residences is enticing, the reality is that most of the brightest on the exterior are made so to hide the rot and decay inside. Many such buildings have fallen into disrepair and are abandoned, making them prime locations to begin a search for forgotten items. Remain alert for traps and other left-over security measures. Spirits in particular, if they haven't already been assigned to guard the premises, seem drawn to abandoned places. Whether they are bound or free, they may take umbrage with your activities, so be wary.

Some territories lack buildings of any sort, or at least anything most of us civilized folk would recognize as buildings. Where do you look in these cases? There are, of course, tools to aid in searches, depending on the object of your search. Magic may be an option, particularly if you know precisely what you're looking for, especially divination magic. If you can tie cards from the Sixth World tarot to the item you seek, by all means use it—provided you could find enough cards to make a reading of any substance. Otherwise, you could ask locals—while taking care, of course, to not reveal overmuch about your search. The only other advice I can offer in such circumstances is to employ the services of an individual skilled at digging up what has been hidden for so long.

Information Peddling

The politics of my kin can be strange. As I have mentioned, long memories are the norm, as is the tendency to hold a grudge. I have witnessed laws passed that make it a crime to utter the name of a particular individual who upset a local noble. It was, all said, an amusing phase, as the particular individual in question was named after the local phrase that meant "thank you." The poor things. The politest members of society were rounded up and executed before everyone got the hang of how etiquette and manners needed to shift. Quite amusing, indeed.

The result of our tendencies is that it can prove difficult to move between borders or even to have one's voice heard (nowhere is that more true than Glibson, where the residents are cursed to speak at full volume whenever possible). This is where having outsiders at your disposal becomes terribly useful.

Perhaps your employer will send you out to peddle his or her influence. Regardless of the magnitude of that influence, your job is to convince your target that you have their best interests at heart, insofar as their best interests coincide with your responsibilities. Should their best interests fail to line up with your responsibilities, it is your duty to convince them to look beyond themselves. Best of luck with that.

As an example, a dear friend of mine (let's call her "Grace") enjoys recounting an incident from a decade past. Grace's employer (let's call him "Mr. Johnson") hired Grace to deliver a message to one Barnabee Gruehnwissle. The message was that if Gruehnwissle demonstrated support for Mr. Johnson's next public declaration at court, Gruehnwissle would be rewarded with a desirable and cushy position, plus a stable of cushy, desirable beauties happy to share said position. Whether or not Gruehnwissle followed through on his agreement to back Mr. Johnson, Grace completed her job admirably. She painted cunning, vivid pictures of the pleasure Gruehnwissle would enjoy upon consummation of Mr. Johnson's simple request.

That is all it took to influence Gruehnwissle and earn Grace's pay. But what if the promises you are entitled to offer are not so tempting? These are the circumstances in which creativity and a knack for salesmanship will aid you considerably.

For example, let us imagine that you have been hired to sway a vote. Your employer wishes another to change her opinion in an upcoming election. Let us say for the sake of example the election determines whether Mr.

Johnson's friends and family are ever allowed to wear indigo again, and that you are to speak with a free spirit named Portent. Portent's opinion is highly valued at court, and Mr. Johnson has had trouble identifying anything Portent will value. As a result, you arrive to speak with the spirit, and the best you have to offer is a drove of sheep and three golden spinning wheels. While some would be snap up this offer as soon as it left mouth, free spirits have more mercurial desires. This would be an excellent opportunity for some learning. Continuing with our example, you discover that Portent finds fortune-telling fascinating and drinks up information about our mundane methods as a brownie drinks porridge and honey. Taking the angle that Portent could use the sheep for extispicy and the wheels for cyclomancy, you present your ideas. Portent accepts your offer, and Mr. Johnson not only allows you to keep your head another day, but pays you as well. Mission accomplished, due to the fact that you were able to make your job seem to match the desires of your target.

Plenty of old grudges and new fears keep people at odds with one another. It has been this way since the beginning of time. We may seem patient in how we take our revenge, but our delayed gratification should not be mistaken for forgetfulness. We enjoy socializing, dancing, and laughter, but we remember anger, frustration, and bitterness..

What does that mean for you? Well, let us examine how you came to be where you are. You arrived, perhaps with barely a rustle. Or it could be that you announced your presence like a crack of thunder. Or perhaps you simply materialized one day, stepping out from behind a statue or a tree. You made your way to court one way or another, arriving in as many pieces as you should. We shall met your arrival with interest, and with watching eyes. We observed how you spoke, how you listened, how you treated authority. We took measure of what you respected and what you did not. Because there was no possible way for you to know the many and varied ways of the Court, you offended someone. It is inevitable, it has happened to everyone. The offense you caused was remembered, and at some point action will be taken in response, to deliver a (likely minor) punishment for your misdeeds. The question is, how will you shape this burgeoning grudge when it is expressed? Will you handle it with grace, laugh it off as the price of getting to know a new and complicated arena? Or will you take offense, look for revenge, and begin a cycle of action and reprisal that will spin out for many seasons or cycles?

There are those visitors to Court that have responded well, and those who have engaged in unending feuds. Knowing who these people are and what the status is of their ongoing grudges can be vital information. It can tell you who might be potential allies, or who might be willing weapons for you to point in a particular direction. It also might tell you who would be interested in incriminating information about another party. Learn about grudges, and know the worth of the information you find.

Doubtless you need a bit of time to become acclimated to your new surroundings. Certain tools and tricks upon which you may have relied in your world elude you here. Such circumstances require an adjustment period. Luck, should she find you, will find you among allies (however temporary they may be). Should you elude luck— well, in that case you won't live long enough to fret much, so best not to dwell on it.

Revealing Hidden Identities

While you are traveling through our realm, pay attention to all with whom you cross paths. Because, as I have told you, all is not as it seems. That dog you saw on the bridge could be a dog. It could also be a creature more powerful than you care to know, disguised to ease hunting. Or it could be someone suffering from a curse. Or it could be a spirit. Or an illusion.

There are plenty of reasons why something or someone may hide their true nature. Perhaps it is for protection. This is the cause for plenty of bastard heirs hiding as common laborers; either the parents seek to protect themselves or the child. Perhaps it is for privacy. I am told that a particularly talented dramatic actress went into hiding to avoid the stifling adulation of her fans. I will not soon forget the uproar at Court after she was discovered living as a maid in the service of an isolated noble. I met a tarot card reader in a domain controlled by Hermit who confided to me that she was the ruler of a neighboring territory; she said she liked to get away from her responsibilities once per season. I do not know if she told me the truth, but someone else discovered the information and, judging by their actions, believed the mystic's story. I truly hope she is enjoying her extended vacation in her rival's dungeon.

It may become your job to uncover these hidden identities. Will you complete your duties for your employer and earn your reward? Will you instead seek to gain allies by keeping their secrets? Or will you keep a secret in exchange for a reward? Choose carefully.

Take care in these jobs. If, for example, you seek to uncover a hidden faction at court, keep in mind that you cannot know how far the faction's roots spread. You may uncover the true identity of someone who seemed innocuous but who is really quite dangerous. If you seek out assistance among your fellows at court, can you be certain they, too, are what and who they seem? No, you cannot. Consider only plans that will not require you to lean on strangers too heavily. Of course, it is useful to have friends (or at least people you consider marginally trustworthy). If you are truly certain of the loyalty of your associates, then I wish you well. Corral them into your service. I simply wish to remind you that trust is rarer and more precious than orichalcum.

Protection

Perhaps the most common role you will find here is as protection. Be prepared to act menacing, but be sure you have the skills to back up the appearance. You won't be paid if your charge is harmed. Though on second thought, perhaps I should probably qualify that: You *probably* won't be paid if your charge is harmed. There are some members of Court who enjoy harm, but in those cases your job as protector will play out differently than the standard duties dictate. You will have to ask your employer for specific details.

Threats lurk in every corner, and the locals know it—probably because they're always scheming against and threatening one another. Some of the tasks you'll be assigned involve cunning on your part, such as when you must protect your charge against spies. From my experience, the best way to perform counter-espionage is to hide your role. Drawing out the snakes gives you the opportunity to take their heads, but they will not emerge if the dogs are visible.

Protecting against thievery is much the same. Rely on intuition, keen perception, and intelligence to capture thieves. Some jobs will benefit from the application of magical wards and traps, for the craftiest thieves find any entrance, be it physical or magical. An old friend once complained that his prized collection of driftwood sculptures was disappearing, piece by piece. It turned out that the ghosts of the ships from which the driftwood originated haunted the premises. When my friend refused to clear out the source of the haunting, my friend's eldest son hired the most skilled thief in the

city to rid the house of the sculptures and accompanying ghosts. We discovered the thief used spirits to enter the manor, materialize, and carry the wood out the open tower windows. The thief disturbed none of the physical traps my friend had installed, because nothing but the sculptures were touched. It was only when he agreed to allow me to call forth a watcher that we discovered the culprit. My friend's son let us know of his role once under compelling magics. Although my friend misses his boy from time to time, he still has the opportunity to see him hanging from the outer wall. Thankfully, the son has been alive throughout his time on the gallows, so the opportunity for a reconciliation is not out of the question.

The simplest application of protection comes against aggressors. The language of the Court speaks against violence, but it can and will never prevent it. Some opponents are out for blood, and here is where your skills in combat become the most beneficial. The aggressors could be highwaymen or bandits, rebellious spirits or other kindred creatures, or skilled soldiers. Your response as protector remains the same.

Take care that your reputation among us as skilled protectors does not become overly outsized. Several decades ago, a small group of outsiders stumbled into our lands. They hired themselves out as guards and made a fine living out of it. They were so foreign to us, so good at their job, and so flamboyant in their presentation, that their charge showed them off at court regularly. Before long, they became such staples at court that it was suggested they act as Court mascots. Such jealousy wafted through Court that several attempts to capture the new mascots resulted in several inconvenient skirmishes. The mascots' former charge tired of the fighting, so she arranged for the outsiders to be turned into statues, which now grace her front gardens. They really are quite beautiful, although I would have set the subjects at ease beforehand; their frozen visages of shock and dismay dim their beauty a touch.

Perhaps the most common foe is not aggressors from without, but those from within. Schemes frequently roil families, so it stands to reason that you may find employment protecting a charge from his or her relatives or close friends. I know of several individuals who choose to keep devious relatives close to better learn of their plots. One individual in particular had his entire staff exiled when he learned of intrigue planned against him. Although it took him months to learn to properly care for himself (he very nearly starved to death), he nevertheless proclaimed he had performed a service for his territory by ousting devious plotters. One month after he learned to start a fire in the oven, he disappeared without a trace, and his manor was overrun with courtiers squabbling for leadership.

Exposing the friends and family of an important individual as schemers is dangerous, to be sure. You must ask yourself whether the alliances gained and lost in such a transaction are to your benefit before you risk a misstep. I heard a tale of a duchess fearful that her husband planned to murder her that she hired a group of five outsiders to investigate the duke and to protect her should the need arise. The outsiders investigated the duke and found the duchess's fears to be well grounded. However, before the duke struck at his wife, he approached the outsiders with a counter-offer. I do not know the offer nor the results of the events that followed, though I know a beautiful copse of six willow trees appeared in the duke's courtyard that same week, just after the duke announced his duchess was murdered by agents from a neighboring territory. No one has seen the outsiders since.

In some cases, the job is to protect your charge against him or herself. Doubtless this is one of the most challenging positions in which to find yourself, for it requires a delicacy and care foreign to many I have met from your plane. This can also, however, be one of the most rewarding assignments. Far be it from me to suggest distasteful options, but I feel I must acknowledge the range of responses I have seen to such an arrangement. Some have used this as an opportunity to learn more about their charges. Imagine, if you will, a marquis fair and just (that may be difficult to imagine, but stay with me.) Said marquis hires you to protect him from himself, telling you he suffers spells causing him to walk the corridors of his private apartments all night in his dressing gown, engaging his deceased predecessors in conversation. He awakes to find he has fallen asleep on the kitchen floor, the barest memory of dreams in which he has learned his grandfather's favorite jabberwocky hunting tactics trickling away from his recollection. Deprived of sleep and dignity, the marquis seeks an end to the episodes. Perhaps this would prove an opportunity to learn the history of the marquis' bloodline. Perhaps you may attempt to involve yourself with these conversations to learn the locations of hidden caches under the palace roof of which only the old rulers know. Perhaps you could suggest to the marquis that if he wishes to pay you a large sum from

the coffers, you could avoid retelling the story at court. Perhaps you may find a cure to his mysterious malady. Or perhaps you could simply resolve to fasten the marquis to his bed every night for the rest of his life. It is entirely your decision, though you of course will remember that every choice has a consequence.

Whether for your employer or for your own benefit, seek to learn everything you can about the people and places around you. You may not learn anything, but the effort counts for something. A fellow I know, Cuordling, has a reputation for appreciating and rewarding inquisitiveness. He believes it shows initiative and respect, and I dare say I agree with him, particularly because I have yet to meet anyone who can understand a word he says. That doesn't stop them from accepting his gifts of luxury mud, though. As it shouldn't: Cuordling's mud fetches an astronomical sum among certain buyers—an easy fact to learn, if you aspire to knowledge.

And what of the places? Did you know that in the seventh-largest settlement of Sorrow's Landing, seven bridges span the center of town? And that on the seventh hour of the seventh day of the seventh month every year, seven fiddlers, each standing on one of the bridges, play a six-minute-long ode? And that anyone who makes a peep during the minute following the song is immediately cursed with seven years of bad luck? Before that tradition began, the town was the third-largest settlement. But every babe in town has fussed during that minute one year or another, and bad luck befalling every child's first seven years of life can take its toll on a population. Therefore, peddlers of sleeping draughts, child-safe rabbit-foot necklaces, and other such charms make a killing here. You would never have known that unless you asked. And think of what that knowledge could do for you!

I must take a moment here to warn you, with a warning that runs counter to perhaps everything we have discussed thus far. And the warning is this: Do not reveal yourself to be too useful or too successful. Shocking, I know! But if you have learned anything from me, dear reader, you have learned that my kin are generally under-appreciative of brighter stars. And considering there are so many more of us than you—well, you can do the sums.

Once, years ago, I had the misfortune to have been accosted by imp brigands while traveling. The tiny thieves swarmed me and made away with an amulet I prized. Heartsick, I arrived at my destination and recounted the events of the road to an acquaintance. Without warning, the fellow ran away in the direction from which I'd traveled. I would learn later that the acquaintance to whom I spoke was a master highwayman in his youth. He had trained a small group of thieves to rob travelers in a quick, coordinated strike. For years, the highwayman and his band bled the roads dry. When the highwayman retired from the business, he disbanded the group and purchased a grand residence for himself. It was just outside this very residence where I recounted my tale to him.

Shocked to see him simply run off without a "by your leave," I followed him. He moved with such rapidity that I found it difficult to keep up, but at the last, I found him. He had located the band of thieves and when I happened upon them, they were having a rather heated discussion. From the safety of the forest's shadows, I watched as a second group of the imps circled around to approach my acquaintance from behind while the others continued talking. He never saw the killing blow.

As I returned to town, I mused on what I had witnessed but could find no good reason for what had transpired other than a simple case of murder. When I returned to my acquaintance's former home, I notified the guests at his soiree that the party had been canceled due to a last-minute change of plans. I could tell they were disappointed, and I apologized most graciously to each of them as they departed. When I informed the house staff that I would be taking over as the new master of the house, the butler said something that caused me to reconsider my previous conclusions. He asked whether their former master had ever told me of the adventures of his youth. That was when I discovered my acquaintance's former life. It seemed to me that the band had a strong dislike for their former leader. Perhaps when he came to chastise them, their hatred for him had reached its tipping point. Perhaps they were afraid of his return to the business and wished no competition. Regardless of the reason, I am certain its roots formed from my acquaintance's extensive success.

This puts me in mind of a story I heard a long time ago. It begins when a strange man stumbled into our realm. We know now that he was human, but not many had set eyes upon a human and therefore knew not what this odd creature was. Upon his arrival, denizens from various factions rushed in to examine the odd transplant.

"What are you?" "From where do you hail?" "To whom do you swear fealty?" Questions upon questions. But the craftsman could not (or would not) answer. From his mouth emanated such strange and alien language, and no one could speak with him. They summoned forth sages and mystics to try to communicate with the hapless man, but their efforts failed.

A young woman arrived. She appeared ordinary enough for one of my kin—a slight green tinge to her skin, luminous eyes the color of birch bark, and a golden glow surrounding her—but she would prove far from ordinary.

She announced her intentions and request at court. "Allow me one week. I swear I will devise a method by which we may understand this stranger."

Many tittered and tsked at this, but her request was granted. In retrospect, I believe it was pure curiosity that drove the decision, but I digress.

She took the stranger away to her tower. No one knows what transpired during the following seven days, but when they returned to court, she presented the stranger again. She bade him kneel beside her and asked him, "To whom do you swear fealty?" She set her hand upon his brow. At the touch, the stranger's face broke into a grimace of shock and his mouth wrenched open. From his mouth spilled several hundred living beetles, which poured down his chest and onto the floor, and then died en masse, rolling onto their backs, tiny legs quivering. After the avalanche of beetles left him, the man drooped, spent. After the beetles stopped wiggling, the young woman stood above the pile of insect corpses and proclaimed their pattern divined the Queen.

The court erupted into appreciative cheers and applause. The young woman offered that she would humbly serve as interpreter and diviner for the stranger as long as he chose to remain in their realm. For the stranger's part, he never once complained or expressed anything other than love and admiration for our world, the young woman, and, of course, his Queen. According to his interpreter, that is.

My lesson for you in recounting this tale is to remind you to never allow anyone to speak on your behalf and never assume an offer of help will be in your best interest.

In conclusion, take heed of my plentiful warnings. I know more about my home than you ever will, I assure you. My greatest wish is to see you arrive, contribute to the well-being, good humor, and beauty of the Seelie Court, perhaps (if you have luck on your side) make a bit of coin, and then leave in one piece. You see, if you were to leave in more than one piece, you would probably try to convince others to avoid coming—that is, if you could speak (since we have multiple ways to allow people to depart in pieces but still communicate in some fashion or another). And we want more of you to visit! So it remains in my best interest to help you survive.

Truth be told, we find you and yours fascinating. We are a curious people and wish to learn all we can about you and your world. The most expedient method of accomplishing this is to encourage a small but steady stream of visitors, and make sure you are able to visit repeatedly, for your edification and education. And ours.

Do not despair; you will see me again. I would not deprive you.

Playing in the Seelie Court

Court of Shadows uses *Shadowrun, Fifth Edition* rules, but the different aspects of this setting require some adjustments to those rules. Below are some changes and additions to the rules that can allow players to fully dive into the unique aspects of this alternative setting.

The Intrigue of the Court

Capturing the secrets and intrigue of the Court is an important part of playing a game using this book, so here are some basics on how the Court functions and the rules—written and unwritten—that govern its functions.

THE FOUR LAWS OF THE COURT

While newcomers and outsiders may perceive the Seelie Court as little more than a bewildering and ever-shifting state of chaos, with no rhyme or reason beyond the fashions of the current season, in fact there are some rules that remain constant. This is not to say that they are always respected, of course, but those who choose to flaunt them do so at their own peril.

Never Go Armed

Coming visibly armed to a party or other Court function is a sign of disrespect, implying that you do not believe the host can protect you. Either that or it serves as a challenge, implying that you do not feel the host is capable of disarming you, and what's more is too scared of you to do anything about it. Naturally, neither of these possibilities is likely to make a good impression. Note that this applies to aggressive magic as well as literal weapons; being decked out in obvious combat enchantments or bearing potent offensive artifacts is just as uncouth as showing up with a sword on your hip. Subtle weapons are fine, of course, leading to all manner of court fashions designed to disguise various lethal spells and implements. Bodyguards are acceptable as well, though bringing too many and/or insisting on keeping them close at hand sends its own message. In the end, though, none dispute that openly wearing personal weapons is a breach of etiquette.

The only exception to this rule are so-called *géar* or "sharp" parties, where showing off new weapons and combat magic is the express purpose of the event.

Never Cut Directly

Insults, threats, blackmail, gossip, and other forms of social violence are the bread and butter of the Court, of course, but nevertheless it is considered the height of vulgarity to be direct in such matters. A Seelie rake would never say "Your dress is cheap and unfashionable," for instance—that's too simple, too obvious. Instead, she might say something like: "I loved your dress when it came out last year; my maid raves about hers." The insults are still there, of course, and it's not likely anyone listening will fail to catch them, but they remain couched in polite, even deniable language. As a rule of thumb, the first person to resort to a direct insult or threat is considered to have lost the confrontation, as it means they were unable to keep up in the battle of sharp wits and careful phrasing so crucial to court life.

The only exception to this rule is a challenge to a formal duel, which custom dictates must be as clear and direct as possible to avoid potential confusion.

There Is No Blood

At first glance, this seems to be a direction to show no weakness; while that's still good advice, this maxim goes beyond that. Supposedly based on a real incident where a Seelie prince entered a ball coated in a rival's blood after winning a duel yet did not acknowledge

anything out of the ordinary the entire night, this phrase means not calling attention to the weakness and injury of others in public, even if they are your enemies. While you may derive great satisfaction from the ruin and humiliation of a rival, it is considered unseemly to gloat or otherwise dwell on their ill fortune in front of others. Poor winners can find support shifting to their victims in a flash, if only to take them down a peg. Likewise, calling out a friend's unfortunate circumstances marks them as worthy of pity, which in turn shows them as weak to the predators of the court. And calling attention to your own faults or problems in anything but a droll way is just the worst sort of self-promotion. For this reason, it is common to hear hated rivals toasting each other's good fortune, while everyone politely overlooks the fact that a haggard noble's threadbare finery indicates a poor turn of events indeed.

Everything is fine, always.

The only exception to this rule is marking the passing of a member of the court, and even then, doing so in less than glowing terms is seen as poor form indeed.

Honor the Óstach Dlí

Last but not least, *óstach dlí*, or "host law," refers to the ancient tradition of respecting the rules laid down by the host of a particular event. Just about any law, fashion, or custom of the court can be invented, altered, or simply thrown out if the host of an event desires, with rules for parties dictating everything from the type of clothing required to an outright inversion of the normal social order. Indeed, the tradition of *óstach dlí* is how the first *géar* parties were created, when a group of nobles decided to abandon traditional disarmament in favor of parties celebrating weapons and combat. The trend caught on, eventually becoming a normal part of the social season.

So long as it is spelled out in advance of the event, a host may set any rules she desires for a gathering. Attendance is therefore considered tacit—yet binding!—consent to the rules of the affair, and also an excellent gauge of the community's approval. A packed house means a noble has touched a nerve or may set a trend, while a flurry of regrets signifies treading on thin ice and/or loss of social status. Likewise, the mere presence of high-ranking nobility demonstrates a kind of approval

that can make or break reputations, while their notable absence has implications as well.

At first blush, this might seem a rule ripe for abuse, but in practice it is naturally self-correcting. It's important to remember that *everyone* at court potentially wields this power, and so hosts that seek to set up parties or gatherings heavily skewed in their own favor—or simply to embarrass rivals—can find the rest of their social season stacked against them as others punish them for overreaching. Creativity, style, and a certain zest for interesting party rules are paramount to getting ahead in the Seelie Court, while attempting to abuse this tradition is seen as petty and, worse yet, horribly dull.

The only exception to this rule is if the ruling noble present declares part or all of the *óstach dlí* invalid, but this is rarely done outside of dire emergency, or perhaps as a truly epic and obvious insult to the host.

THE ART OF INDIRECTION

Power, simply stated, is the ability to make others do what you want them to do. Money, position, charm, wit, intelligence, and attraction are some of the tools of power; physical intimidation is, of course, another tool used in much of the world, though it is viewed as too crude and inelegant for Court use.

Knowledge is another important tool of power, particularly when it provides information about what the opposition may be up to. Members of the Court are, of course, loathe to give away any bit of knowledge that might be used against them, and that includes the most basic—their motive. Much of the work in the Court involves attempting to conceal one's motives while uncovering the motives of others. This is the reason Court plots are so convoluted and filled with misdirection. For example, initiating a hunt for a particular artifact may seem to indicate a desire to find or possess that artifact, but the hunt may actually be a feint to see how others react. The whole pont may simply be to see who comes after the artifact, and who truly wants it. It may even be an effort to make others think the artifact is desired, to distract them while a more secret, subtle activity takes place. The only thing that you can be certain of is that the search for an artifact is never just about the artifact. Nothing is ever that simple.

What this means is that conversations at Court are about finding out who is doing what, and why, while misleading others as to what you are doing. Simple to state, but complicated in practice—and artful, too, if you're doing it right.

The Web of Relationships

The Seelie Court and its environs are about relationships, betrayals, intrigue, and diplomacy (with the occasional careful placement of a dagger or crossbow bolt). Alliances with factions and individuals are a critical part of working in the Court, so special rules are needed to govern how contacts and relationships function.

Street Cred and Notoriety from the primary *Shadowrun* setting do not cross over into *Court of Shadows*. There is simply not enough information-sharing between the two realms for that kind of information to cross over. Street Cred (called Honor in the Court setting) and Notoriety scores for the Court should be tracked separately. Characters with enough Honor or Notoriety can be known by other courtiers. When a character is recognized, Honor becomes a bonus to their Social limit (p. 368, *SR5*). If the character has more Notoriety than Honor, it becomes a hindrance in forming new contact relationships. For every 2 points of Notoriety over Honor, improving Loyalty costs an additional 1 Karma or 2 munera.

Faction Affiliations

The politics and alliances of the Seelie Court are a critical part of this setting. As players maneuver through the Court, they may become friendly with one or more factions, to the point that the faction considers them to be affiliated. For the purpose of these rules, players can only be considered to be affiliated to one faction at a time. Should they gain a second affiliation, the first affiliation is dropped, pre-empted by the new connection.

When players have an affiliation, they receive some ancillary benefits thanks to that faction's current relationship with other factions. To determine affiliation, treat each faction as a group contact. (Note that the following rules are a modified version of the **Group or Organization Contact** rules, p. 176, *Run Faster*).

GROUP CONTACTS

Players may gain individuals in a faction as contacts, but that is not the same as gaining an affiliation with a faction. To do that, the faction should be treated as a group contact, using the rules as follows.

When acting as a group contact, factions are

relatively faceless, and so they act in different fashion than individual contacts. It cannot do the character any favors, but you can gain or owe munera to the faction (see **Munera** sidebar). Loyalty is limited to 1, and the character has duties and obligations to the faction that they should not break, lest they lose their affiliation. Those duties and responsibilities come in the form of munera; upon receiving an affiliation, PCs receive a debt of one munera to the faction, which the faction can use to call on favors.

Along with balances of munera, group and organizational contacts can provide legwork or networking services. Additionally, known affiliations bring various bonuses and penalties in Social tests (see **Faction Social Test Modifier** table, p. 176). There are two ways for an affiliation to be known; one is for the players to simply tell people. Faction leaders will automatically know of their affiliation with their particular faction, so those leaders will immediately be subject to Social test modifiers, regardless of player action. If the players intentionally reveal their affiliation to any other Court members, the gossip mills spread word of their affiliation quickly, so then faction modifiers apply to any relevant Court dealings.

In addition to the Social test modifiers, the group contact provides bonus dice to the character they can use in tests made during legwork or efforts to find help. This represents the character using the channels within the organization. There is a downside to using this kind of contact, as it leaves a clearer connection between the faction and the player, which allows other courtiers to have some idea about what you are up to.

Selecting a faction affiliation is a little different than choosing other contacts. Treat the Karma spent at character creation for an affiliation as part of the expenditure for positive qualities, making it part of the limit that can be spent on qualities. Connection ratings for the various factions are listed in the Faction Connection Rating table. Note these ratings are only applicable within the Court and nearby metaplanes; the factions do not have extensive connections to the material plane, so connections do not extend out to there.

USING THE FACTION AFFILIATION

The munera debt and repayment system is the principle means of maintaining relations within a faction, but there are some others.

Munera

Munera is an old term that originally referred to public works that brought benefits to the people, but in other courts, including the Seelie Court, it became a kind of social currency to measure what a faction has done for you or what you might owe a faction. Note it is social currency only, not physical currency. It represents the favors performed or owed between factions, as well as the social standing gained through interactions with faction representatives. Munera can be spent to get a faction to perform a favor, at a rate of one munera per Rating point of the favor, per the **Favor Rating Table**, p. 389, SR5. *It can be earned in the same fashion. By performing a favor beyond a munera debt, that debt can turn into a positive balance.*

Munera may also be the result of a social coup. If an individual takes down a rumor [illegible] with a spectacularly nasty bon, they may receive munera from that faction. Other examples of social skill or unexpected discretion may gain similar benefits. Munera cannot be [illegible] traded by a player to a [illegible] positive or negative balance.

Munera can only be owed to (paid to) an affiliated faction. If an affiliation is lost, all owed munera relative to that faction [illegible] that is owed to a faction [illegible] at a time of [illegible] every [illegible] rounded down.

Maintaining Affiliation Relations

Affiliations are maintained through munera. Characters receive a debt of one munera to an affiliated faction per cycle. This may reduce a positive balance, or put them deeper in the red.

If PCs carry a munera debt to factions over an ongoing period of time, they may risk losing the affiliation. At the beginning of a cycle, if a PC has a negative munera balance, the character must make an Etiquette + Charisma [Social] Test, with a threshold of the absolute value of their debt. If they fail, the faction puts out an ultimatum—either commence a favor immediately that will completely erase the debt, or lose faction affiliation. The faction gives (threshold) weeks for the completion

of the favor. If the favor is not accepted or not completed in the designated time, the faction affiliation is lost. The munera debt adds to the player's Notoriety at a rate of 2 munera to 1 point of Notoriety.

USES OF INDIVIDUAL CONTACTS IN THE COURT

Along with faction affiliations, PCs may gain individual courtiers as contacts. Below are rules (adapted from p. 178, Run Faster) that provide extra dimensions on using contacts within the intrigue-based rules of the Seelie Court. With the elements listed below, gamemasters should be sure to reward players for good role-play—if they develop a good approach, or role-play it in interesting and entertaining fashion, give them an appropriate dice pool modifier as a reward.

Blackmail

The character may gain an advantage over a faction when they learn information about its activities that it does not want the general public to know. Should the PCs want to live dangerously, they can try to hold this information over the faction's head. Loyalty then becomes a measure of how much leverage you have over this affiliation. Loyalty Tests still apply as normal, but it's not giving up the character the contact is worried about, but having the blackmail exposed. With blackmail, a contact's Loyalty (Leverage) doesn't diminish, nor can a contact leave the character. The character must use Intimidation in order to get this contact to do anything for him (see **Using Intimidation**, below). Favors with a blackmailed contact do not cost the character.

If the contact fails a Loyalty (Leverage) Test it means he no longer cares who knows what he's being blackmailed for. The contact then is not a contact anymore. The character gains a point of Notoriety, and there are now people out for payback (use the contact's Connection Rating to determine the approximate Professional Rating of the people who will be coming after the character on his behalf). Any other fallout of the blackmailed information on the contact is up to the gamemaster. Contacts with this quality cost an additional 2 Karma.

Using Intimidation

Would your character threaten/bully a contact to get what he wants? Intimidation can be used with negotiations through a Teamwork Test (p. 49, SR5) in order to gain a favor or service from a contact without having to pay for it or fall into debt to the contact through cash or favors. Note that this cannot be used against group contacts or affiliated factions. The cost of abusing contacts in this fashion is an immediate reduction of Loyalty by 1 and removal of the player's ability to improve the relationship between the contact and character. Every use of intimidation continues to reduce a contact's Loyalty by 1 until the contact is lost.

Faction Social Test Modifier

If you are affiliated with ↓ / Then you have the following Social test modifiers →	Aes Sidhe Banrigh	Bastard	Comet	Death	Dragon	Eclipse	Hanged Man	Hermit	Higher Power	Magician
Aes Sidhe Banrigh	+4	-4	-1	-1	–	–	-3	+1	+3	+2
Bastard	-4	+4	–	+1	-1	–	+1	–	-2	–
Comet	-1	–	+4	-1	–	+1	–	-3	+1	-1
Death	-1	-1	-1	+4	-2	+2	+1	-1	–	-3
Dragon	–	-1	–	-2	+4	–	-1	–	-1	+2
Eclipse	–	–	+1	+2	–	+4	-1	-1	+1	-2
Hanged Man	-3	+1	–	+1	-1	-1	+4	–	-2	–
Hermit	+1	–	-2	-1	–	-1	–	+4	-1	+1
Higher Power	+3	-2	+1	–	-1	+1	-2	+1	+4	-1
Magician	-2	–	-1	-2	-2	-2	–	+2	-1	+4

The exception to this Loyalty reduction is contacts who are being blackmailed.

Using Con/Seduction

Would your character deceive/lie to their contact in order to keep the relationship going? During downtime, an opposed Con (p. 141, SR5) Test can be used to maintain a contact's Loyalty. If successful, the contact's Loyalty remains the same even if the contact had to make a Loyalty Test in the same week. If the character gets more net hits than the contact's current Loyalty, the Loyalty rating goes up by 1. Failing this test reduces the contact's Loyalty by 1. This test can be made only once in a downtime period per contact. If the character fails to pay off debt in the appropriate amount of time or does not redeem a favor asked by the contact, any Loyalty Test that fails reduces their Loyalty by 2. The character also earns a point of notoriety for their deception.

Translating Characters to the Court

For the most part, attributes and skills translate seamlessly into the Seelie Court. Magic functions just as it would in the Sixth World, swords swing, fists punch, etc. To keep the high-fantasy feel of the Court, firearms and other such weaponry take on the visual characteristics of more era-appropriate items; pistols become hand crossbows (possibly with laser sights), grenades shift to older-looking models (ceramic exteriors packed with gunpowder), and other such transformations, but these changes have no effect on the stats of the weapon. For ease of gameplay and maintaining balance, everything from weapons modifications to ammunition capacities remain the same, though the nature of some ammunition loading systems change as noted in the tables.

Similarly, technological augmentations—cyberware, bioware, nanowire, genetech, etc.—may lose some of their shine when they move to the Court, but they maintain their functionality (including wireless options—see **Hacking the Court**, below).

Characters traveling to the Seelie Court, or those created especially for *Court of Shadows*, may wish to have gear names and labels that are more appropriate for the Court's fantasy setting. Alternate weapon names, along with their stats, are provided in the **Court of Shadows Weapons** table. Not all weapon makes are included here; adjustments can be made by naming a particular type of weapon after a faction or a weaponmaker of note (i.e., Eclipse slurbow, or Hephestus' arbalest). While most of the named weapons below are crossbows, to better simulate the type of action players use while employing a firearm, that does not mean that players bringing in a crossbow from the Sixth World receive an automatic upgrade. They must retain the stats the weapon currently has. Note that many objects, such as different types of rope, survival gear, cyberware, and bioware don't need different names and so are not included on this table. They are still eligible for use in the *Court of Shadows* setting, though they may require some change in description, as detailed here:

- **Grenades**: Grenades do not have a polymer exterior; rather, they are made of ceramic or metal.
- **Commlinks and cyberdecks**: These stay in a player's possession, but take the form of a notepad upon which images and writing appear.
- **RFID tags**: These take the form of small, metallic scarabs.
- **Cameras**: These take the form of small boxes with lenses set in them, or crystal stones users can peer through.
- **Sensors**: These are specially formulated stones, such as lodestones, but with more ability besides magnetism.
- **Laser microphones**: These appear as small ear trumpets.
- **Maglock passkeys and keycard copier**: These look like large, metal keys with movable teeth and flanges that can switch around to fit a variety of locks. A press of a button sets the key moving through several patterns and settings.
- **Gas masks**: The masks take on a more old-fashioned appearance like a plague doctor's mask, which is made of leather and has a long beak stuffed with aromatics to counter whatever gas might approach the doctor's airways.
- **Cyberlimbs**: These gain more of a steampunk vibe, with visible gears, pistons, and rotors but no loss in effectiveness.

There are two areas, though, where simply translating skills and gear over with a different appearance is not sufficient: rigging and hacking. Those two areas will be discussed in more detail in the pages that follow.

Court of Shadows Weapons

Ranged weapon	Equivalent to _	Acc	DV	AP	Mode	RC	Ammo*	Avail	Cost
Sling	Taser	4	9S(e)	-5	SS	—	4(m)	—	250¥
Hand crossbow	Holdout	4	6P	—	SA	6(m)	4R	120¥	
Bullet crossbow	Light pistol	7	7P	-1	SA	—	14(d)	7R	425¥
Slurbow	Heavy pistol	5	9P	-2	SS	—	6(m)	4R	400¥
Chu ko nu	Machine pistol	5	6P	—	SA/BF	(1)	35(d)	6R	270¥
Repeating crossbow	Submachine gun	6	8P	—	SA/BF/FA	1(2)	50(d)	11F	900¥
Munition crossbow	Assault rifle	5	10P	-2	SA/BF/FA	—	38(m)	4R	950¥
Stonebow	Shotgun	4	10P	-1	SS/SA	—	5(m)	4R	450¥
Blowgun	Dart pistol	5	as Drug/Toxin	—	SA	—	5(m)	4R	600¥
Longbow	Sniper Rifle	7	12P	-4	SS	—	5(m)	4R	2,100¥
Windlass	Machine gun	5	10P	-3	FA	—	100(d)	12F	7,000¥
Hand cannon	Cannons	4	16P	-6	SA	(1)	6(m)	20F	21,000¥

* Ammo is listed as either magazines or drums, as these types of weapons do not lend themselves well to clips.

Rigging the Metaplanes

Rigging is a bit more difficult than translating other skills, but not substantially so. There are not, of course, a lot of cars, boats, motorcycles, and t-birds running around the Seelie Court, and also a distinct lack of drones.

All that means, though, is that rigging translates from a mastery of machines to a mastery of animals. Through mystical means not fully understood by observers (since very few observers have had a chance to travel through the new connection to the Court), the gifts and technologies used by riggers become a quasi-mystical connection to the animals or paracritters of the area.

Keep in mind the "quasi" part—this does not mean riggers suddenly have magical abilities or a Magic rating. It means, though, that they can gain ownership of some of the Court's critters, jump into them, and maneuver them like they would drones and vehicles.

Gamemasters can use multiple approaches to giving riggers useful abilities in the Court. First, they can introduce critters that act essentially as drones or vehicles, with comparable stats. Creative adjustments can be made to creatures so that what they do is more reflective of their animal nature—giving them, for example, a power such as Flay Touch might be a more interesting power for a flying critter instead of trying to mimic the firing power of an SMG mounted on a Roto-Drone. But this should be the result of cooperation between the gamemaster and player—if, in the end, they decide to give the rigger a bird they can jump into that spits stones at a high velocity and rapid rate, that can fit into the weird reality of the Seelie Court and keep the rigger in the game.

The **Animal Rigging Substitution Tables** shows some possible types of critters that could be substituted for existing drones and vehicles. Note that when using these substitutions, the stats of the drone should still be used, rather than the stats of the critter. When substitutions are not provided, a carriage or other conveyance pulled by another animal can be used as a substitute.

Animal Rigging Substitution Table: Drones

Drone	Animal substitute
Shiawase Kanmushi	Ant
S-B Microskimmer	Blister beetle
MCT Fly-Spy	Fly
Horizon Flying Eye	Will o' the wisp
Aztechnology Crawler	Devil rat
Lockheed Optic-X2	Hawk
Ares Duelist	Chimpanzee
GM-Nissan Doberman	Doberman pinscher
MCT-Nissan Roto-Drone	Eagle
C-D Dalmatian	Vulture
Steel Lynx	Lynx

Animal Rigging Substitution Table: Groundcraft

Groundcraft	Animal substitute
Dodge Scoot	Mule
Harley-Davidson Scorpion	Camel
Yamaha Growler	Zebra
Suzuki Mirage	Horse
Rover Model 2072	Elephant
Ares Roadmaster	Juggernaut

Animal Rigging Substitution Table: Watercraft and Aircraft

Craft	Animal substitute
Morgan Cutlass	Humpback whale
Proteus Lamprey	Gray whale
Samuvani Otter	Blue whale
Vulkan Electronaut	Dolphin
Yongkang Gala Trinity	Killer whale
Aircraft	Animal substitute
Artemis Nightwing	Pegasus
Ares Dragon	Dragon (lesser)
Cessna C750	Roc

Animal Rigging Conversion Table

To get this rating ...	Use the critter's
Handling	Agility
Speed	Sprint movement bonus
Accel	Run movement multiplier
Body	Body
Armor	Armor
Pilot	Logic
Sensor	Perception
Seats	1 per every 2 meters of length, rounded up, limited by Strength/

The other possibility for riggers is to give them a chance to hack into and control the types of critters they find in the Court, so that instead of coming up with animals with drone- or vehicle-like statistics, they use the critter stats but have the animal under their control.

To use critters in rigging, translate their stats as shown in the **Animal Rigging Conversion Table**. Note that Availability and Cost are not provided on this table, as this method requires characters to encounter and hack/train critters, rather than buy them. Riggers wishing to purchase animals for use in the metaplanes should use the **Animal Rigging Substitution Table**, and note that the animals they use have the stats of the vehicles, not of the critter.

Note that critters are not for sale in the Seelie Court (ownership of such critters is not something the courtiers consider to be an actual concept); acquiring a critter for rigging use requires training them, per the rules on p. 183, Howling Shadows. While many riggers may prefer to buy vehicles and drones in the material plane and bring them over so they can translate into animals, training critters while on the metaplanes can present new challenges for characters.

Hacking the Court

There is, of course, no Matrix in the Seelie Court and associated metaplanes. There is still, however, a need for the basic services the Matrix provides, namely information preservation, transmission, and security. In the Seelie Court, these functions are provided by the *coimeádai*.

THE COIMEÁDAÍ

Although court fashions come and go, one tradition that has proved especially enduring is that of the *coimeádaí*, more often simply known as the Keepers. Gliding behind the beautiful and terrible members of the Seelie nobility, typically mute to all but their master and swathed from the neck down in beautiful yet all-concealing fabrics, it still might be easy to overlook *coimeádaí* amid the grandeur of the court if it were not for one thing: their utter indispensability.

A *coimeádaí* is a living storage vessel, filled with the memories and emotions of their master, there to be tapped as a useful resource in the endless intrigues and countless centuries of court life. A noble who holds a *coimeádaí's* coin can access the stored information with little more than a touch or a whisper, allowing them to choose when and where to employ their life experiences and information for maximum effect.

And in return, all a mortal needs is to sign away a portion of their lives in hopes of a great reward on the other side.

A PENNY FOR MY THOUGHTS

A *coimeádaí* is the result of a very particular bargain, struck between a noble of the court and an eager (or desperate) mortal. Although it is technically possible to create *coimeádaí* out of unwilling mortals, it is considered extremely unfashionable, and (perhaps more importantly) legends caution that strong-armed servants seem to "accidentally" betray their masters at the most devastating times. Whether this is true or simply superstition, the combination of poor taste and possible loss of security is enough to keep most nobles from trying it.

Besides, why stoop to kidnapping and force when there are always plenty of mortals begging for the favor of the courtiers?

Assuming a suitable mortal is located, a *coimeádaí* begins with a bargain. It used to be that a year and a day was the traditional durance of a Keeper, though some paranoid nobles change servants more often, while more sentimental ones may keep a particular mortal around for a decade or even longer. Given how complex a *coimeádaí* network is, however, and how finicky it can be to "swap out" individual components, most nobles trade a measure of security for a bit less hassle and stay at least somewhat close to the original annual time frame.

As for the bargain itself, it can be most anything the noble is willing to promise in exchange for the mortal's service. Magical favors are popular, of course, as are enchanted items, but if something can be imagined, it's likely been requested at some point or another. Dickering is customary during such negotiations, with the mortal attempting to wring the most from the Seelie while the noble attempts to maximize the duration and depth of service. Considering the binding magics involved are quite demanding on both parties, however, it is in the best interest of the noble to deliver as promised.

Once the terms of the deal are struck, the mortal receives a symbolic payment, or pá, to enter the service of the Seelie Court. A coin is traditional, though any small and durable object will do, as it needs to be something that can be easily carried (or hidden). As the physical focus of the *coimeádaí* magic, in skilled hands this item can provide the metaphorical "key" to cracking their magical encryption, which means it is usually placed someplace safe soon after the ritual is complete.

Of course, while maintaining the security of their Keepers is paramount, most nobles also don't want to let the pá get too far away either, lest they worry it has gone missing or been tampered with in their absence. A noble who does not carry it with her, therefore, is either supremely confident in her cleverness in hiding it or secure in the knowledge it is formidably guarded. Most nobles are neither, however, and so tend to bring their Keepers' pá with them one way or another, a fact clever thieves and spies can potentially exploit.

SO MANY THOUGHTS, SUCH LITTLE MINDS

Legend has it *coimeádaí* were first created as an experiment of sorts, to see if mortals magically gifted with the thoughts and insights of a courtier could truly understand the perspective of nobility. In that respect it was an utter disaster, with most mortal minds simply shattering under the weight of such ancient and alien thoughts. However, the sorcerers who moved to clean up the mess found something interesting—the memories that had been gifted were still intact, even if the rest of the mind was not, and they could be retrieved in pristine condition.

With further experimentation, talented practitioners found that by clearing out suitable space in mortal minds, a servant could be rendered a living storehouse of information while still retaining basic mortal utility (walking, talking, performing simple tasks). Given the long lives, endless histories, and untold secrets of the nobility, this was a revelation almost beyond price, for it allowed the elders of the court to shed centuries of accumulated living and its attendant ennui and experience the world again as if for the first time, while still keeping their original knowledge safely stored and in easy reach.

Opponents of the practice point out that items can be enchanted to serve similar memory storage purposes, but adherents of the *coimeádaí* swear that memories and feelings stored in inanimate containers quickly grow sterile and stale, more like pictures of the thing than the thing itself. By contrast, they claim, a living host keeps the memory fresh and the emotions as powerful as when they were first experienced.

Aesthetic values aside, the tactical and strategic benefits of the *coimeádaí* in court politics also cannot be ignored. By entrusting the relevant memories to a Keeper, for example, a noble could then honestly claim to know nothing about a particular intrigue—even if

she was actually the mastermind. Likewise, passing off unwanted emotions can make meeting with a hated rival or a former lover much more tolerable.

And that's not even getting into the possibilities of sharing certain memories or feelings—for a price, of course.

A SOCIAL NETWORK

Although creating a Keeper is useful, there is a limit to how much a mortal mind can hold before it breaks down and the vessel loses its utility. Many courtiers therefore find it necessary to create several *coimeádaí*, typically entrusting each one with a particular type of knowledge or emotion. One might contain a century's worth of memory, another feelings for a long-lost love that have become too hard to bear, and so on. Accessing stored memories and feelings is a simple matter of touch or a particular command phrase uttered in the presence of the Keeper, which then causes the information to flow back into the noble.

Most beings would be more than content with such potent and useful tools already, but of course the courtiers have to go just a little bit further. Older, wiser, or simply more paranoid nobles could have a dozen *coimeádaí* or more, and even decadent as the Court can be, it's simply not practical to have so many mortals hovering around them at all times. Not to mention that going to a particular mortal too often could give away the nature of the information stored within.

The solution, then, was to "network" the *coimeádaí* by means of mystical, interlocking tattoo designs. By inking pieces of a single design on multiple Keepers, a noble can potentially draw on the experience or knowledge of any of the *coimeádaí* linked to the one they're addressing. They can also isolate some Keepers by giving them interlocking designs, essentially making it impossible to access their information remotely. Most Keepers also sport multiple false design pairings as well, in order to throw off potential observers.

While it is an extremely rare sign of trust in the paranoid world of Court, it is possible for two or more nobles to use this same method to link Keepers with each other, thereby sharing selected memories or emotions with others through the network. Each noble must contribute at least one *coimeádaí* to link, and regardless of the relationship involved such a pairing is called a leannán aigne, or "lover's mind." It is considered an extraordinary act of trust and devotion to forge a leannán aigne with another noble, and a nigh-suicidal one to have the Keeper so bonded be part of a larger personal network.

Of course, where there are valuable secrets to be had, there will always be thieves to try to claim them.

THE FORTRESS OF MEMORY

As might be expected, Keepers are well-defended magically, particularly their all-important minds. After striking the bargain, they receive complex and beautiful warding tattoos that cover large areas of their skin, essentially creating an impassable firewall against brute force enchantments and memory spells. Mundane coercion does little better, as neither a lover's hips nor a brute's fists can force their secrets past their lips; even if a Keeper wanted to betray his master, he is unable to speak, write, or otherwise give up the information entrusted to him.

However, that does not mean the *coimeádaí* are beyond all trickery. There are several ways a skilled memory thief can potentially tap into the secrets locked away in a Keeper's mind. For the most part, these techniques are equivalent to normal hacking techniques; the *coimeádaí* are devices that hackers can break into, looking for particular memories to alter or copy.

Some sample *coimeádaí* stats can be found on p. 187. When hacking into these individuals, treat them as a living persona, so that their Matrix attributes can be determined per the **Living Persona** table.

Living Persona

Device Rating	Resonance
Attack	Charisma
Sleaze	Intuition
Data Processing	Logic
Firewall	Willpower
Armor	Armor
Pilot	Logic
Sensor	Perception

This means that every *coimeádaí* needs a Resonance Rating. This technically makes them technomancers, but if they did not have technomancers skills before, they do not have them now. Since Resonance skills cannot be used untrained, this means that *coimeádaí* generally cannot do technomancerly things such as compiling sprites, but they can thread complex forms. This makes them into sometimes unpredictable obstacles, as they might throw out weapons opponents were not aware that they had, but the mental enslavement comes at a cost—Keepers generally do not have the self-awareness, initiative, and wits to respond to threats with any kind of flexibility. Their masters usually instruct them to follow a set pattern of defenses, much like a host has IC that launch in a particular order. Unless a *coimeádaí*'s master provides new instructions, the Keeper will always follow the prescribed order of defenses.

The unusual nature of *coimeádaí* allows for some different Matrix actions that can be used in the Seelie Court, as follows:

PÁ DUPLICATION

(Complex Action)
Marks Required: None
Teat: See description
As valuable as they are, pá are closely guarded by all those who hold them. Attempting to steal them is possible, much as it might be possible to steal an individual's commlink in the Sixth World to gain information. In the Seelie Court setting, deckers and technomancers gain the mystic ability to sense the shape of a pá and attempt to summon a duplicate out of thin air. The duplicate is a creation of the Seelie Court version of the Matrix only; it has no physical substance and cannot be used in the way the physical object of the pá could (for example, if the pá is a coin, the duplicate a hacker creates cannot be melted down into its component precious metals or spent in any way). The process for duplicating a pá is identical to the process of gaining a mark using either Brute Force (p. 238, SR5) or Hack on the Fly (p. 240, SR5). With each mark gained, the pá becomes a better duplicate, giving the same levels of access to a Keeper that having one, two, three, or four marks on a device provides. As with both Brute Force and Hack on the Fly, Pá Duplication is a Complex Action.

The pá is drawn from the essence of the *coimeádaí*, so its stats are derived from that. Treat the *coimeádaí* as a living persona (p. 251, SR5). All *coimeádaí* should have a Resonance Rating, even if they are not otherwise technomancers—the enchantment of the fae provides the temporary Resonance while the individual serves as a Keeper. Note that this only functions with *coimeádaí* on the metaplanes; no other creatures can gain Resonance this way, and once the *coimeádaí* leave the metaplanes of the Seelie Court, all Resonance attributes disappear. For the purposes of this book, the arcane rituals to create a *coimeádaí* are beyond the characters, so they cannot make their own Keeper.

EXPOSE CONNECTIONS

(Complex Action)
Marks Required: 1
Teat: Electronic Warfare + Logic [Sleaze] vs. Firewall + Logic
This technique presents a new way to track and gather information around the Seelie Court. It is indirect but can yield great rewards for the patient. Essentially it involves creating a particular word or phrase, weaving a Matrix code structure around it, and then spreading it around the Court as much as possible.

This is a Complex Action that requires an Electronic Warfare + Logic [Sleaze] Test opposed by the Firewall + Logic of the *coimeádaí*. Net hits reveal the next Keeper in this network (one Keeper per net hit), which helps the hacker see how things are structured. A mark is needed on the first *coimeádaí* targeted with this action, but not the others revealed as part of the network. Snoop actions can then be used to intercept messages traveling in this network.

HACKING KEEPERS

The memories stored in Keepers represent the knowledge of the various factions, meaning they have the same value as datafiles and other similar Sixth World storage. Memories can be copied or edited, just as Sixth World datafiles can, in order to discover valuable information or make changes that can influence events going forward.

Hacking into *coimeádaí* can also fit another important Sixth World activity, namely gaining access to places where you are not supposed to be. The magic used to lock doors in the Court works very similar to biometric locks in the material plane—namely, certain people are able to open a lock with their touch, while others cannot. Courtiers often give their *coimeádaí* access to locked rooms, so that the Keepers may journey to such rooms in advance of their masters and make whatever preparations may be necessary. This means that gaining

control of a *coimeádaí* can be an excellent way to gain access to restricted areas of the Court.

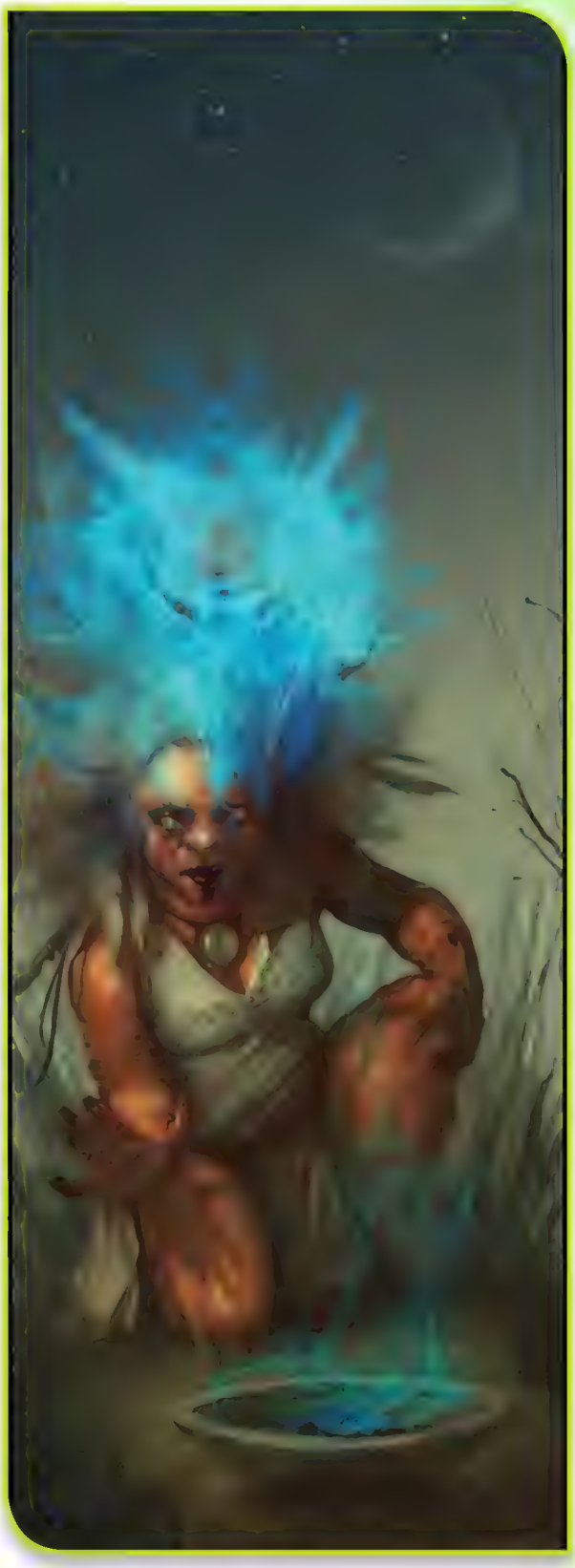
Keepers also act as a visual security system, similar to cameras. Their masters often use clairvoyance to see what their *coimeádaí* see, which means that by hacking into a *coimeádaí*, hackers can interfere with surveillance or gain access to Court security feeds. Note that hackers do not actually gain clairvoyant abilities; they simply are able to interfere with the abilities of the *coimeádaí*.

AUGMENTED REALITY AND VIRTUAL REALITY IN THE SEELIE COURT

Characters used to the constant barrage of AROs in the Sixth World may be somewhat disoriented by the lack of such visuals in the Seelie Court. The shifting nature of the Court, along with the many paintings and tapestries that decorate its walls, may offset this lack somewhat, but the absence of regular communication clamoring for attention should be a change the characters notice—a change that some might believe is for the better. This does not mean there is no augmented reality, though. While they are not aware they are doing it, the Resonant nature of the *coimeádaí* means they display AROs over their heads, reflecting their status. Most of the Seelie Court, especially those who have nothing to do with the material plane, are unaware of these images, since they have no way to view augmented reality. Anyone in the Seelie Court with the ability to perceive augmented reality can perceive these images. The images are simply the name of the *coimeádaí* (the name given by their master, not their real name) along with some coding system to indicate the number of marks an individual has on the Keeper. This coding is idiosyncratic, changing from Keeper to Keeper, and changes for each individual—if the team's decker has two marks on a *coimeádaí*, but no one else on the team has any, the mark will appear one way to the decker and another way to everyone else.

SEELIE GRIDS AND HOSTS

The local "grid"—that is, the Resonance structure that enables *coimeádaí* functioning—is the primary grid of the Court, and all "devices" of the Court are accessible from it. Each faction has their own specific grid with *coimeádaí* belonging to faction leaders. The Court grid functions as a local grid, while the faction grids function as global grids. Rather than advertising, faction grids contain images derived from the faction and positive



messages about the faction. The local grid does not function outside of the Court structure; faction grids sometimes extend beyond the walls based on faction leaders' whereabouts, but they are erratic. There is no equivalent to the public grid.

As currently constituted, *coimeádaí* cannot be arranged into hosts, meaning that type of Matrix activity is not available. *Coimeádaí* can, however, engage in some IC-like activities (see **Keepers and Crows**, p. 187), which should help keep hackers on their toes.

THE ROYAL OPPOSITION

Upon leaving the Sixth World, hackers may breathe a sigh of relief, thinking that while electronics may be limited, they will at least not have to deal with hassles from the almighty Grid Overwatch Division. They are only partly correct—GOD's reach does not extend to the metaplanes of the Court, but there is still security keeping an eye on the Keeper network and willing to crush any opposition that appears.

In functionality this works the same way that GOD and demi-GODs work in the Sixth World, but the terminology is different. Rather than having security spiders who deploy IC to combat intruders, the Seelie Court has individuals known as the Crows monitoring their network and occasionally manipulating Keepers to change their defensive strategies.

Crows are not beings of magical powers; rather, they have hacking skills (in fact, some of them are expert hackers brought to the metaplanes by lucrative promises from the fae). In this respect, they fill the same function as security spiders in the Sixth World, in that they monitor networks for intrusion and actively counter efforts when they detect them. They are somewhat less aggressive than their material plane counterparts; rather than go for the neural damage GOD agents like to cause, Crows generally like to try to find out the identity and/or location of intruders, and then either send Court denizens after the hackers, or use the information about their identity in ongoing Court intrigue.

KEEPER LOSS

It should be noted that simply killing a Keeper does not destroy the information they hold. Instead, that data typically returns directly to the original master. While a sudden rush of memories and emotions can be a disorienting experience, it causes no lasting damage; therefore it is usually a lot more profitable to steal information rather than break the vessel. This makes data bombs a delicate tool to use, since they often result in damage to a *coimeádaí*'s physical mind, meaning they might never return to their normal selves even after being released from service. There is some value in using data bombs for shock value—a sudden flood of memories returning to a master lets them know that a Keeper has been damaged, and this can set off a hunt for the culprit. By planting information appropriately, hackers might be able to frame someone for the job in a way to help them advance in Court.

KEEPERS AND CROWS

Below are some stats to use for common versions of *coimeádaí* and Crows that players might encounter in the Court. *Coimeádaí* have descriptions of common defense programs they will follow.

Standard Coimeádaí (Professional Rating 3)

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	Ess	Res
2	3	2	3	2	4(5)	2	2	5.8	4

Condition Monitor: 9
Armor: 6
Limits: Physical 4, Mental 5, Social 4
Physical Initiative: 4 +1D6
Skills: Clubs 2, Computer skill group 5, Cybercombat 4, Electronic Warfare 4, Hacking 5, Perception 3
Qualities: Codeslinger (Full Matrix Defense)
Augmentations: Cerebral booster 1
Living Persona: Device Rating 4, Attack 2, Sleaze 2, Data Processing 4(5), Firewall 2
Complex Forms: Infusion of Firewall, Resonance Spike, Resonance Veil
Gear: Armor clothing [6]
Weapons: Club [Club, Acc 4, Reach 1, DV 6P, AP —]
Typical Defense Program: Infusion of Firewall, Jam Signals, Resonance Veil, Resonance Spike. Full Matrix Defense may take priority over any of these actions.

Aggressive Coimeádaí (Professional Rating 4)

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	Ess	Res
3	3	3	4	3	4(5)	5	3	5.8	5

Condition Monitor: 10
Armor: 6
Limits: Physical 5, Mental 6, Social 5
Physical Initiative: 8 + 1D6
Skills: Blades 3, Clubs 4, Computer skill group 5, Cybercombat 5, Electronic Warfare 5, Hacking 6, Perception 3
Qualities: Codeslinger (Hack on the Fly)
Augmentations: Cerebral booster 1
Living Persona: Device Rating 5, Attack 3, Sleaze 5, Data Processing 4(5), Firewall 3
Complex Forms: Diffusion of Firewall, Infusion of Sleaze, Pulse Storm
Gear: Armor clothing [6]
Weapons: Club [Club, Acc 4, Reach 1, DV 7P, AP —]
Sword [Blade, Acc 6, Reach 1, DV 7P, AP -2]
Typical Defense Program: Diffusion of Firewall, Hack on the Fly, Infusion of Sleaze, Hack on the Fly, Pulse Storm

Secure Coimeádaí (Professional Rating 5)

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	Ess	Res
5	4	4(5)	4	6	5(6)	5	5	5.3	6

Condition Monitor: 11
Armor: 12
Limits: Physical 6, Mental 8, Social 8
Physical Initiative: 8(9) + 1(2)D6
Skills: Clubs 3, Computer skill group 6, Cybercombat 5, Electronic Warfare 6, Hacking 6, Perception 4
Qualities: Codeslinger (Jam Signals)
Augmentations: Cerebral booster 1, synaptic booster 1
Living Persona: Device Rating 6, Attack 5, Sleaze 5, Data Processing 5(6), Firewall 6
Complex Forms: Infusion of Attack, Infusion of Firewall, Diffusion of Attack, Resonance Veil, Puppeteer
Gear: Armor jacket [12]
Weapons: Club [Club, Acc 4, Reach 1, DV 7P, AP —]
Typical Defense Program: Infusion of Firewall, Diffusion of Attack, Infusion of Attack, Brute Force, Puppeteer, Resonance Veil

Standard Crow (Professional Rating 5)

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	Ess
3	3	5	3	5	6(8)	5	4	4.9

Condition Monitor: 11
Armor: 6
Limits: Physical 4, Mental 8, Social 6
Physical Initiative: 9 + 1D6
Skills: Archery 5, Computer skill group 8, Cybercombat 7, Electronic Warfare 7, Hacking 9 (Personas +2), Intimidation 4, Perception 6
Qualities: Codeslinger (Hack on the Fly)
Cyberdeck: Implanted, Device Rating 5, currently set to Attack 8, Sleaze 6, Data Processing 5, Firewall 7
Augmentations: Cerebral booster 2, commlink (implanted, Device Rating 6), datajack
Programs: Armor, Biofeedback, Biofeedback Filter, Encryption, Exploit, Fork, Guard, Hammer, Mugger, Sneak, Track
Gear: Armor clothing [6], jammer (area, Rating 6)
Weapons: Crossbow, medium [Crossbow, Acc 8, DV 7P, AP -2]

Alpha Crow (Professional Rating 6)

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	Ess
5	3	6	4	6	7(10)	6	4	4.5

Condition Monitor: 11
Armor: 9
Limits: Physical 7, Mental 11, Social 7
Physical Initiative: 12 + 1D6
Skills: Archery 6, Computer skill group 11, Cybercombat 12, Electronic Warfare 7 (Jamming +2), Hacking 12, Intimidation 5, Perception 9
Qualities: Codeslinger (Brute Force), Exceptional Attribute (Logic)
Cyberdeck: Implanted, Device Rating 6, currently set to Attack 9, Sleaze 7, Data Processing 6, Firewall 8
Augmentations: Cerebral booster 3, commlink (implanted, Device Rating 7), datajack, mnemonic enhancer 2
Programs: Armor, Biofeedback, Biofeedback Filter, Demolition, Encryption, Exploit, Fork, Guard, Hammer, Mugger, Sneak, Toolbox, Track, Virtual Machine
Gear: Armor vest [9], jammer (area, Rating 6)
Weapons: Crossbow, medium [Crossbow, Acc 8, DV 7P, AP -2]

WIRELESS BONUSES IN THE SEELIE COURT

Just as *coimeádaí* provide quasi-mystical ways for hackers to interact with the memories stored in them, devices that would be wireless in the Sixth World radiate the same signals that hackers can interact with, just as they would in the material plane. In the Seelie Court, this extra boost in effectiveness is referred to as the item's **gramarye**, so any bonus gained from activating it is a gramarye bonus. Providing this bonus leaves items vulnerable to hackers, just as the wireless bonus does.

Miscellaneous Information

TIME IN THE COURT

In agreement with many stories of fae realms, time moves slower while players are in the Court and surrounding areas. In general, a month spent in the Court is equivalent to a day passing in the material plane. This allows players to enter the Court, have a detailed adventure, then return to the Sixth World without having the world pass them by. This can, of course, present challenges for players who leave the Court, spend a month or so in the material plane, then return to the Court to find many cycles have passed, but the Court is patient and steady, and the long-lived nature of the courtiers make them more resistant to rapid change than their mortal equivalents. That means the players might return without great changes hitting the Court. When in doubt, of course, the gamemaster can bend and twist time to suit their needs, giving the players the chance to have fun in either setting without the passage of time causing insurmountable difficulties.

While generally the passage of time should be used to serve the story, occasionally players might force the gamemaster's hand by partaking in one of the two special foods of the Court, honey cake or leann daerg (red ale). Give the players plenty of advance warning that eating these things may cause problems, though the exact nature of the danger does not have to be specified. If players ignore the warnings and consume these foods, then they will experience time in the material plane moving much faster than their time in the Court, and they'll have to adjust once they return!

PAYMENT IN COURT

Material goods are not entirely unknown in the Seelie Court, especially by the Higher Power faction, but the almighty nuyen is not as fervently worshipped there as it is in the Sixth World. Payment is more likely to come in gems, precious metals, or magical items such as foci or reagents. There are enough Sixth World denizens in the Court that they recognize the worth of the nuyen, and the Higher Power faction certainly has use for any forms of hard currency. Electronic transfers of cash, though, will be rare, meaning runners will often be paid in credsticks or physical goods.

Remember to account for the costs for fencing items (p. 419, *SR5*), and make sure the payment they receive translates into enough nuyen to compensate them fairly for the jobs they are asked to do. Also remember, of course, the value of munera (p. 176) in the Court, though munera should only be used as payment when players have an affiliation with a particular faction.

SEELIE COURT ANARCHY

The intrigue and story-based gameplay of *Court of Shadows* is well suited to the narrative play style of the upcoming *Shadowrun: Anarchy* rule set. The character conversion concepts provided in that book would be suitable for fast-paced explorations of the Court and surrounding metaplanes.

How To Disappear

by Jason M. Hardy

Black leather never stands out like it does when it's surrounded by bright silk and taffeta. Codswallop was no Court rookie, but just because he knew the scene didn't mean he wanted to conform to it. Blue Mohawk, white A on his shoulder, face paint like a football player. He made concessions to the Court, because if he didn't he wouldn't be there, but his appearance wasn't one of them.

"I dress like this for two reasons," he said, sticking two fingers in Rivet's face. "One, because I look spizz. Two, because I'm ready for anything. If I want to dance, I'll dance so to make the rest of them pumpkins look like they never heard of rhythm. But if something goes down—and I mean anything, knife fight, bodysnatch, whatever—I'm ready. You and the others will get all caught up in your slips and petticoats, and I'll be getting drek *done*."

Rivet nodded. She thought she looked like a pure force of nature in her sky-blue gown, with subtle gems on her tusks to match, but Codswallop could dress how he liked. In front of her, fabric swirled around lean, warm bodies in perfect time to lively strings, while servants did a dance of their own weaving through the crowd and making sure no bit of hunger or thirst went unrelieved.

"And I'll tell you another thing," he continued. "People out there got it all wrong with all that formal dancing and precise movement. Everyone gets so consumed learning the steps, they forget that the real power is being the one who plays the music."

Rivet nodded like Codswallop was imparting deep wisdom. She knew he liked that.

"And I got a tune in mind they need to hear," he said, grabbing a flute and tossing back the champagne inside in one smooth motion. "Watch how I play."

"And I'll tell you this," Codswallop said, ripping into a large turkey leg while he was talking, "anyone who lets themselves get neutered like Viltharion deserves what he gets. I mean, come on, he's got an axe, doesn't he? A nice one, too, from the looks of it. He needs to stop sitting in the corner whimpering and start swinging, right?"

There were several side conversations going on, and Rivet guessed that the main topic of them was how this boorish mortal got himself invited to the Regency Banquet. That made her job easy—she just had to listen and provide the right information.

"This is what the Court will become," intoned a hawk-faced woman with steel-grey hair in one of these murmured discussions. "Sponsorships will be given out of a crude sense of novelty, and wit and elegance will be replaced by capering puppets."

Rivet placed a hand on her chest. "Believe me, I'm as mortified as you. He represents our kind so poorly. And he is likely the type to not understand any punishment directed his way, making it useless. But shouldn't his sponsor have to pay? After all, isn't the sponsor to blame at least as much as this sorry individual?"

The woman smiled, probably thinking she was hiding the cunning in her face. "You make an excellent point. Sadly, such sponsorships are generally not openly known. Perhaps, though, some careful inquiries might draw that information out?"

Rivet winked and quickly swiped the side of her nose with her index finger in a gesture she knew was not at all subtle. "I'm on it."

She drifted around the room for a half hour or so, having several conversations that had nothing to do with Codswallop, or anything of consequence at all. Then she returned to the hawk-faced woman.

"It's Eclipse, of course," she said. "So passionate about the outside world, so indiscriminate about what it contains."

The woman smiled her tight, cunning smile. "Well done. Well done, indeed."

Rivet did not exchange smiles or even so much as a glance with Codswallop at that point. Despite some appearances, this wasn't amateur hour.

At Morning Hearings, two days later, Codswallop was clearly hungover. His skin was a special shade of green, and he could barely stand. Yet when his name was called, he somehow managed to rise and not wither under the harsh glare of the Queen. With most speakers, the Queen graciously offered an invitation to speak, but she only glared at Codswallop. He was, however, undeterred.

"Morning, your worship, you wonderful rose among all these blasted thorns. Just wanted to tip my hat in your direction, 'cept I seem to have forgotten my hat, but you take my intent, I'm sure. Anyway, my regards for being one of the least objectionable beings in this Court, and here's hoping maybe someday you and the rest decide to renounce racism."

The Queen allowed her icy stare to be her only reply.

"I know you got some differences, but I figured you and elves from my plane are all pretty much the same brood, right? So maybe you all could lighten up about the rest of us, stop discriminating, and let everyone who wanders your way come forward on a, you know, equal basis. Put yourself on the right side of history and all—that's my advice. That's it. Thanks for your time."

Neither the Queen nor the Steward offered any summary or reply to Codswallop's remarks, instead allowing to stumble off. There was some enthusiastic applause from a single individual, but since no one could see who was clapping, most observers assumed it was one of the Court's many mischievous spirits.

Rivet watched Codswallop exit, being sure to wear an expression of disapproval. Inside, though, she was wondering if the charade had become too obvious. It was time to stop provoking and wait for a reaction.

Not that night but the next, a knock came on Codswallop's door in the darkest dark. He responded quickly and opened the door looking alert, because it was the time of day when he was at peak functioning.

Outside was a helmeted and armored figure, face darker than could be explained by the brim over its forehead. Some magical force was obscuring its features. It was a Keeper, a *comeádaí*, someone's servant. It extended its hand in a gesture Codswallop didn't recognize, but he didn't have to. His cybereyes saw the ARO the *comeádaí* generated, which simply said "An invitation."

"Have at it, mate," Codswallop said. "Invite away."

The *comeádaí* made no move, only shared a memory. A fairly recent one, of Xanthe Cove of Eclipse talking. She sat in a book-filled study, her round face lit by flickering candles.

"Your game may not be the most subtle, but that doesn't mean it hasn't been effective. You've at least got people talking. Let's nip this in bud before it gets out of hand, shall we? It won't require much out of you. It's mostly the same game you've been playing, but with a few twists. The compensation will make it all worthwhile."

Codswallop smiled, then tapped out a simple rhythm on the doorframe. The Keeper didn't respond in any way.

"Yeah, fine, don't dance," Codswallop said. "But don't pretend you're not hearing the beat."

"It's long. That's the only complaint I have." Codswallop had his feet on a pine stool in one of the small tavern rooms of the Court, leaning back in a chair whose purple cushions were showing their age. "Stabbing someone in the back goes nice and quick. Here, you've got to have patience. But it's worth it. Real test of your skills, isn't it? Stabbing someone only shows that you know how to draw a sword. So crude."

Rivet licked foam off her upper lip as she put the pewter mug down. "You're talking like one of them now."

"Don't have to be one of them to see the merits of the system. It's more ... evolved. The cream really rises to the top, rather than some lucky swipe with a knife taking you out."

"You only think that because you're doing well right now."

"Yeah, and I intend to keep doing well, so no worries."

"Just make sure the Keeper pays you before you do anything rash."

Codswallop's only reply was his best imitation of the Queen's icy stare.

Rivet blinked a few times, then rubbed her eyes. Still, the vision persisted. Codswallop was standing on a small stool in a room filled with expensive silks and wools. A chubby, bald man was skittering back and forth, measuring here and there with an actual tape measure, writing things down on paper with a stubby pencil, because people of the Court were often quite determined to rub their resistance to any technology in visitors' faces.

"So you've gone and sold out," she said.

"Short-sighted again. You want to play this game, you really need to think ahead. Lookit." He snapped his fingers. "Get me that sample piece I liked. The blue one."

It was wool in a shade of blue that matched his hair, with thin black stripes on it. The tailor handed it to Codswallop, then dug in a pile of fabrics and passed over the studded leather jacket. Codswallop put the vest on, then the jacket over it. He spread his arms.

"Picture of perfection. And I got a sweet invite to the Robin's Waltz. Plum Room, one of those places with a balcony overlooking the main floor. I will see and be seen." He turned up his collar. "And I will look smashing."

The ball put the other parties Rivet had seen to shame. Fountains of champagne, wine, and other drinks flowed across the grand hall, among pillars covered in branches with budding leaves. She sampled many of them, but knew enough to leave the red liquid brimming in one bowl alone. Music resonated across the room, full strings that sounded like they were played with wood that had been shaped and aged over five thousand years. Codswallop made full use of the balcony, standing tall and proud in his perfectly tailored vest under his leather jacket, sneering at anyone who dared look at him too long, and occasionally throwing ice at unlucky courtiers on the lower floor. It was a new kind of a game now. He was outrageously over the top, ridiculously provocative, so courtiers knew that if they gave into him, if they reacted in any way, they lost. They did not understand the purpose of the game, but they were still completely unwilling to lose it.

Rivet had a quieter role. She was his spotter, moving around on the floor, picking out designated targets. For the most part, these were people who were soon going to have to duck ice flying their way, but some unfortunate individuals had a different fate. Instead of jeering at them or throwing things in their direction, Codswallop smiled at them broadly and shouted out a boisterous greeting. These individuals inevitably blanched and looked for a place to hide. In the Court, guilt by association was not much different from any other form of guilt.

Something about Codswallop was off, though. Some of the people he was supposed to be friendly toward were targeted by ice, and vice versa. Rivet didn't know if he was drunk, had a bad memory, or was playing some other game. Or all three. But she did not let any concern show on her face.

"'Course I mixed it up! Predictability is death here. Gotta keep your employers guessing, and now that I have two of them, that's all that more people that I have to keep off-balance. When you're a street fighter and a little undersized, one of the first things you learn is to always keep the other guy off balance. Let them get their feet under themselves, you're dead. So I'm making sure they don't get comfortable."

"You're also pissing a lot of people off."

"Yeah, but I'm making myself indispensable, too. They wouldn't dare get rid of me. Plus, that's not how the Court works. No knives slipped between your ribs on the ballroom floor, right? Battle of wits is the thing."

Rivet shook her head. She was pretty sure he would take it to be admiring, so she let him.

It was late. Codswallop had once again managed to get an invitation to the Regent's banquet, and he was determined to shut the place down. A creature of dark feathers had lost whatever language capacity it had hours ago and was limping around the room while flapping awkwardly. An elf who had arrived at the banquet wearing a silver circlet on her brow was now idly spinning the circlet around her index finger. Codswallop sat behind ten empty cups, eating macadamia nuts while playing some sort of game with tarot cards. His opponent was a blue-skinned, six armed human-like creature who still seemed cheerful despite the fact that he appeared to be losing.

A distant bell tolled four times. The door to the hall opened, and the Keeper with the brimmed armored hat and blank face walked in, then stood stiffly by the door.

Codswallop made no gesture toward the *comeádaí* and did not glance at it, but his demeanor changed. He leaned forward and played his cards with greater alacrity. He was winning before, but now his opponent truly started to suffer. It only took fifteen more minutes before his opponent was out of whatever it was they were wagering. The blue-skinned man leaned back.

"Does this mean you are ready to call it a night?"

Codswallop shrugged. "Might just spend some time thinking about what to do with my winnings."

"You have amassed considerable sums. But you also have debts, correct?"

Codswallop shrugged.

"And you are not worried that someday soon, accounts will be called."

"If they are, I'll be fine."

"What if you have to choose to whom you will be loyal?"

Codswallop smiled in a way that was probably supposed to be charming but came across as smug.

"Didn't think that happened here."

They were back in the small tavern, and Codswallop's feet were once again on the pine stool.

"A faction badge would give you some security," Rivet said.

"So would a nice corp job. Doesn't mean I want it. Besides, I'm safest as a free agent. Keeps everything in balance."

"As long as you're sure you have all the variables covered."

He shook his head. "Keep watching. Keep observing. See how I play the game. Of course I have it covered."

Another late night. Another crisp knock on Codswallop's door.

He welcomed the helmeted *comeádaí* with a jaunty grin.

"Would you like to come in?"

The Keeper did not acknowledge the request in any way.

"Then what can I do for you?"

The *comeádaí's* right hand lifted and made a simple, slow sweep toward the hallway. It seemed clear enough, but the word "Come" floating over the hand made its meaning even more plain.

"All right, mate, let's go."

The Keeper led Codswallop through parts of the Court he had never seen before, parts that possibly didn't exist before. They twisted down spiral staircases, walked winding corridors, passed through doorways of wood, doorways of moss, doorways of vine. At last he walked through a stone archway flanked by torches atop a stone staircase. The *comeádaí* stopped in the doorway. A few steps down stood Xanthe Cove, with a light purple mist poling at her ankles.

Codswallop smiled. "Shook things up a bit, didn't we?"

Cove, dressed in a black-and-white doublet, smiled back. "Indeed. And you have added some unpredictability lately as well."

"Part of the job, right? Keep everyone guessing."

Cove nodded. "That sort of chaos can be beneficial. Of course, it's even better if some of the chaos can be controlled, at least from one point of view."

Codswallop shrugged. "Controlled chaos isn't really a thing, is it? Either it's chaos or it ain't."

"Or it appears to be chaos to the people who simply lack understanding."

At this point, the smoky mist had coalesced enough at Codswallop's feet that tentacles could be seen. And felt, as they grabbed his legs.

Codswallop looked quickly down, then glared at Cove. "Right, what sort of bullshit is this?"

"You played well, but slowly. A step or two behind. But you were noticed enough that your disappearance will be a sensation. The talk of the Court for a time. Which we will steer more efficiently than we steered you."

It happened fast. More tentacles appeared, grabbed a suddenly struggling Codswallop. He turned to the impassive *comeádaí*, and naturally found no help there. He made exactly zero progress against the tentacles that wrapped him up, then pulled him down into inky blackness until he was gone.

Cove looked to the top of the stairs and smiled. "It was a good plan."

Rivet tilted back the helmet of the *comeádaí* disguise that had, on multiple occasions, served her well. The blackness that had covered her face washed away.

"He was full of advice, but he forgot one," she said. "Puppeteers are often so busy pulling strings that they miss the ones attached to them."

Cove nodded. "We'll need at least two stories spread. One that his disappearance was an act one vengeance from Eclipse, and another that it is an attempt to frame Eclipse."

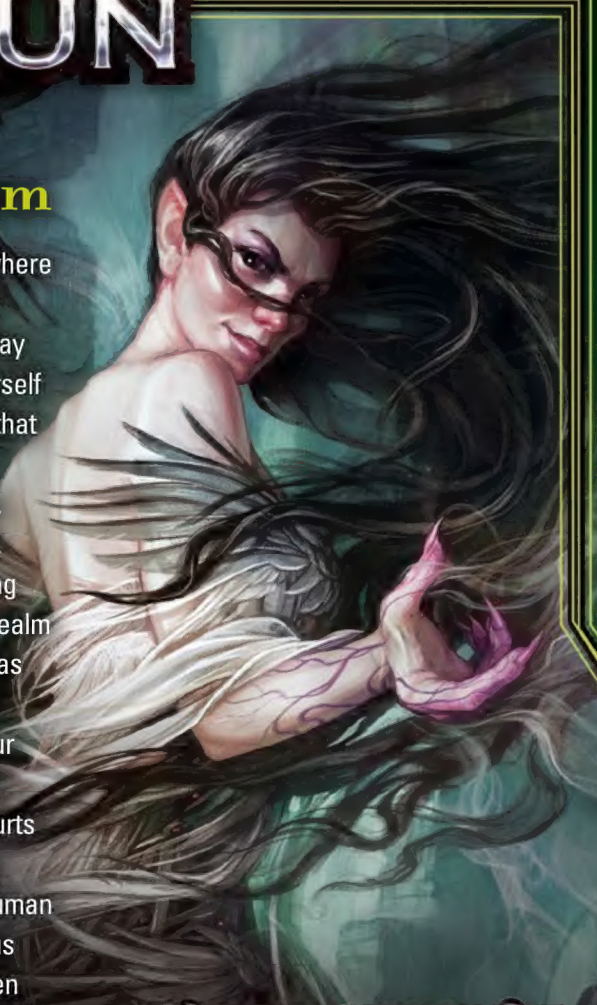
"And a third, that he ran in fear."

Cove nodded. "Just be subtle."

"Of course." One thing the Court had taught her that Codswallop never could was the virtue of disappearing in plain sight.

SHADOWRUN

The Falling Dream



You have seen it. You have felt it. The dream where you are falling, falling, and you cannot see the ground but you know it is there waiting. You may try to brace yourself, you may try to force yourself awake—you do anything to avoid the impact that keeps rushing toward you.

The Seelie Court is the realm of the hidden, the rumored, and the unknown. Fairies, spirits, and enchanted creatures mingle there, building alliances, plotting, scheming, toying with the realm of humans—and with each other. The Court has long held a distant attachment to the material plane, influencing it like a dream influences our waking hours. But now a new connection has emerged, allowing humans to infiltrate the courts and influence its proceedings. At a time when magical power is ever in the rise, the mix of human and fae could set both worlds into a calamitous plunge, and no one will want to be awake when they hit bottom.

Court of Shadows is an alternate setting for ***Shadowrun, Fifth Edition***, emphasizing the magic and intrigue of the Seelie Court. With full setting, character, and plot details, as well as information on using *SR5* characters in the Seelie Court, this book presents all-new ways to play *Shadowrun* and to live in the mystical intrigue of the planes of fairy, capturing the magic of the dream world—and seeing if they can prevent its fall.

Court of Shadows is for use with ***Shadowrun, Fifth Edition.***

SHADOWRUN
FIFTH EDITION

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